'Ich wunsche mir, aussuchen zu durfen, wer ich bin': Shifting identities in the works of Jurek Becker

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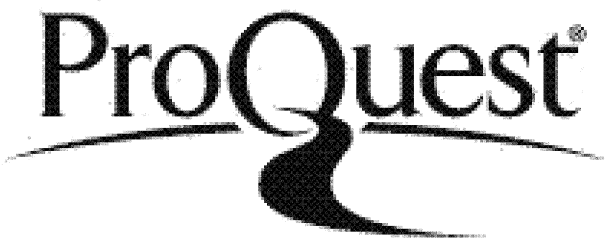

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CONTENTS

Abstract

As a Polish Jew with no memory of his childhood as a Holocaust victim, Jurek Becker was an author for whom the question of identity held paramount importance throughout his life in East, West and unified Germany. This thesis aims to examine the complexities relating to identity in the life and work of Becker by analysing separately in four parallel chapters the shifts and tensions between his complementary identities as Jew, writer, German and socialist. Identity is understood in post-modernist terms as multifaceted and 'in process'. It is shaped by the interplay between the subject's self-perceptions and the social discourses and differences surrounding him.

Chapter One analyses Becker's identity as a Jew, which he initially seeks to reject as something externally imposed by post-war German discourse. As he internalises this social identity, Becker begins to search for his forgotten past, despite the barriers created by lack of memories. The adoption of the identity of writer, conversely, is a very conscious process for Becker, analysed in Chapter Two. Central to Becker's understanding of this role is his desire to positively influence social processes while maintaining sovereign control of his writing, which he finds equally difficult in each of the German societies he inhabits. Chapter Three examines how Becker's Holocaust experiences caused him to be viewed in post-war Germany as an outsider. His own feelings of otherness are exacerbated by the persistence of anti-Semitism. Only after the *Wende* does Becker perceive Germany as his *Heimat* in more than a political sense. Chapter Four shows how Becker constructed a positive socialist identity transcending Germany's ideological division after his original identification with the SED was undermined by its involvement in the crushing of the Prague Spring. However, he is ultimately disillusioned as the new hope for communism he derived from Gorbachev's reform policies proved unfounded.

By presenting a differentiated picture of four identities, this thesis examines the interplay between them as they conflict with and complement each other. Overall, the thesis shows that the focus of Becker's writing eventually shifted from political to more personal concerns and that his approach to the question of identity becomes increasingly playful. After initially seeking to reject contradictions within his identities in order to 'fit in', Becker eventually embraces these tensions as integral components of a particularly complex identity.

Abbreviations

JL - Jakob der Lügner

IB - Irreführung der Behörden

DB - Der Boxer

ST - Schlaflose Tage

NZ - Nach der ersten Zukunft

AF - Aller Welt Freund

BK - Bronsteins Kinder

WS - Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller

AH - Amanda herzlos

EG - Ende des Grössenwahns

Introduction

0.1 The Historical Background of Jurek Becker's Works

The publication of *Jakob der Lügner* in 1969 marked the beginning of Jurek Becker's distinguished career as a writer, a career which was to span over a quarter of a century in East, West and unified Germany and which produced a total of seven novels in addition to a volume of short stories and numerous essays and articles. In fact, Becker had been writing professionally for a decade before *Jakob* was published, firstly producing cabaret scripts for an East Berlin theatre then film and television scripts for the GDR film company *DEFA*. Becker's return to the medium of television in the 1980s and 1990s combined with the widespread acclaim he received for his literary accomplishments meant that he became an important name in both East and West German cultural scenes.

The issue of identity is a central theme of Becker's work as a whole and indeed the question of his own identity was a key preoccupation of Becker's throughout his life.[1] Official documentation shows that he was born as Jerzy Bekker to Polish Jewish parents on 30 September 1937 in the Polish town Łodz. Yet even this date is uncertain. In order to make his son appear old enough to work and thus save him from deportation, Becker's father falsified his son's date of birth and the family was initially able to remain together when imprisoned in the Łodz ghetto in March 1940. In 1944, however, Becker's father, Max, was deported to Auschwitz while Becker was moved to Ravensbrück with his mother. They were liberated by the Red Army in April 1945 and moved to Sachsenhausen, part of which had been converted to a medical facility. Here Becker began the slow process of recovery, though his mother died shortly after the end of the war from malnutrition. Becker later claimed to have no memories of his Holocaust experiences or of his mother, his earliest memories were those of being reunited with his father (who by now had forgotten Becker's true date of birth) and moving with him to East Berlin.

In the ghetto and camps, Becker had retained the Polish name Jerzy and was known to his family as Jurek. When he moved to Berlin with Max (whose lie to the authorities that he had been born in Bavaria simplified this procedure enormously), Becker now adopted the German version of his name: Georg. He continued to use this name for official purposes - at school and university, in the army, in his wedding to Rieke in 1961, writing

[1] For a concise yet thorough outline biography of Becker see Colin Riordan (1998: 7-11). Sander Gilman's 2002 biography of Becker provides a detailed account of Becker's life, especially his childhood in Poland and growing up in Germany after 1945 in the Soviet Zone of Occupation and then the GDR.

for *DEFA* (in this case under the pseudonym 'Georg Nikolaus') - throughout his time in the GDR, though at home he was still known by the name of his Jewish childhood, Jurek. In Becker's third novel, *Der Boxer* (1976), we see how he must have retrospectively viewed this change to the German form of his name as the adoption or even the imposition by his father of a German identity, as the character Aron attempts to germanise himself by changing his name to 'Arno'.

Hence the tension between Becker's Jewish and German identities existed for as long as he could remember and was influenced not least by his father's attitude towards Germans.[2] In addition to germanising his son's name, Max Becker also refused to speak Polish (the language of Becker's childhood) with him, convinced that the sooner Becker learnt German, the easier he would find the transition to his new surroundings. As Becker forgot Polish considerably quicker than he learnt German, he was briefly rendered quite literally speechless. This language acquisition further represents the assumption by or imposition on Becker of a German identity and is also reflected in *Der Boxer,* where Mark, the character closest to Becker biographically, is given the identity of 'son' by Aron, whom he accepts as 'father' as the latter teaches him these new words. Yet despite these efforts to facilitate his son's assimilation, Max Becker also taught his son to feel different to Germans and to display this difference openly. The fact that Becker was noticeably taller and older than most of his classmates, combined with his imperfect command of the German language, made the biographically determined differences between him and his peers unmistakable in any event. Becker later claimed that he had spent much of his youth trying to eradicate these tangible markers of otherness in an attempt to 'fit in'. Nevertheless, his first texts, the cabaret scripts he wrote in the late 1950s, all appeared under the name Jurek, rather than Georg Becker.

Despite this sense of difference from his peers, Becker later claimed he was able to establish a positive sense of belonging in the GDR. The official GDR ideology, which from the outset proclaimed East Germany to be the truly antifascist successor to the Third Reich, allowed Becker to view the GDR in positive political terms which transcended any historical concept of Germanness and thus as wholly separate from the country which had been responsible for his past suffering. Indeed, East Germany used the presence of the capitalist Federal Republic to legitimise its own status as a socialist state and like many

[2] Interestingly, Becker never considered himself a Pole and never used the Polish form of his name after the war.

others during the GDR's early years, Becker grew up convinced of the inherent legitimacy of SED rule, prepared to accept its undemocratic practices on the grounds that an enforced socialism was better than no socialism. Moreover, the ideological discourse of the SED constructed identities in simplified terms of binary opposites that enabled individuals to positively identify with the party. To be antifascist and anti-capitalist simultaneously meant that one was a convinced socialist, loyal to the party and willing to engage in collective efforts to construct a socialist state. It was within this ideology that Becker found his sense of *Heimat* (homeland) as he became first a member of the FDJ then later the SED, to which his loyalty remained unwavering until the GDR participated in the military intervention in the Prague Spring in 1968.

Literature was perceived as a key tool in the GDR's central aim of 'Aufbau des Sozialismus' and like the state's political ideology, it was expected to present a clear political message with which the reader could easily identify. As Becker was growing up in the GDR in the 1950s, the literary doctrine of socialist realism simplistically portraying unproblematic advancement down the road to a socialist utopia was at the heart of cultural policy. Wolfgang Emmerich (1988: 198) defines this as a 'pre-modern' form of literature. 'Ihr Kern waren eine eng gefaßte Widerspiegelungs- oder Abbildtheorie und die unumstößliche Forderung des *positiven Helden.*' (Emmerich 1988: 200) In accordance with the official perception that they could exercise great influence over the public consciousness, writers were elevated to a position of great importance in the GDR and as a young writer Becker fully embraced this notion of playing an educational social role. The ability to engage with and influence one's surroundings was key to Becker's understanding of what it meant to be a writer and a citizen and enabled him to further develop a sense of belonging in the GDR.

Despite this ready acceptance of the role of educator and an attendant sense of fulfilling a socialist function as a writer, Becker rejected socialist realism as a literary form from the beginning of his career. Indeed, after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 socialist realism was becoming increasingly discredited in the GDR. For Emmerich (1988: 201), it was from the period of 1963 onwards that the increasing industrial modernisation of East Germany brought about a new era of modernist literature 'die weder völlig unterdrückt noch völlig integriert werden kann'. The literature of the 1960s continued to be largely supportive of the state, 'vor allem indem sie sich die Planer und Leiter, die den Prozeß der Produktivitätssteigerung voranbringen sollen, zu Helden wählt and damit als

gesellschaftlich beispielhaft ausweist. Doch bereits in diesen Jahren und zunehmend um 1970 wird eine konzeptionelle Gegenbewegung erkennbar.' For the first time, texts by authors such as Volker Braun and Ulrich Plenzdorf openly question the established order and begin to portray 'Verluste und Opfer der eigenen Gesellschaftsordnung' in place of the previously positive heroic figures. Nevertheless, Emmerich claims too that within this modernist GDR literature there was still no fundamental conflict with the state ideology: 'Das Telos der Menschheitsgeschichte, die Befreiung und Selbstverwirklichung der Individuen in freier gesellschaftlicher Assoziation, ist nicht grundsätzlich infragegestellt und schon gar nicht aufgegeben.' (Emmerich 1988: 202)

In Becker's earliest novels though, we can see that these certainties are most definitely being called into question. In *Jakob* the narrator remains cut off from contemporary GDR society due to his past as a victim of fascism, while in *Irreführung der Behörden* (1973) we meet Hensel, a pensioner who lives in poverty and presumably near total isolation after the protagonist Gregor Bienek breaks off his regular visits. Moreover, in *Jakob* as in his later novels, Becker employs complex narrative structures to encourage his readers to view reality as multifaceted and narratives as unreliable. He undermines concepts of fixed or predetermined identities and blurs the margins between good and evil.

After the brief period of renewed optimism ushered in by Honecker's promise of 'no taboos' when he took over as Party leader in 1971, Becker's disillusionment with the SED grew with the progressively more restrictive cultural politics of the mid-1970s, culminating in the enforced expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976, and his writing increasingly became a protest against the political events around him. For Emmerich, it is only now, partly as a result of the SED's unfulfilled promises of democratisation, that GDR literature begins to display more postmodernist tendencies: 'Der Zusammenbruch der Aufklärungs-Moderne, Weltuntergang, Katastrophen-Bewußtsein, Endzeitgefühle: Das ist seit nun etwa zehn Jahren auch ein dominantes Thema der DDR-Literatur.' (Emmerich 1988: 206) Nevertheless, many authors of Christa Wolf and Christoph Hein's generation continued, in the words of Wolf, to hold on to an 'Utopie-Rest' (cited in Emmerich 1988: 207), despite acknowledging the catastrophic state of the world. For Becker, however, no such utopian dreams remained. For his critical stance with regard to what became known as the 'Biermann Affair' he was expelled from the SED, and his first literary output after this event, *Schlaflose Tage* (1978), contains by far the most polemical political criticism of the GDR of any of his work. Within a year of Biermann's expatriation, Becker had

followed many other prominent intellectuals, such as his friends and colleagues Manfred Krug and Sarah Kirsch, over the border to West Germany.

In the West Becker never achieved a sense of belonging and continued to claim up to the collapse of the GDR that he would prefer to return there to live, if only his work was published there. Indeed, he retained his GDR citizenship throughout this time, obtaining dual nationality after successfully applying for his West German passport in 1977. Becker perceived the capitalist West as fundamentally at odds with his strong socialist convictions and his experiences of public expressions of anti-Semitism there increased his sense of alienation. At the same time Becker's relationship to the GDR steadily disintegrated, as he realised he was now seen there by his friends as a visitor from the West rather than as a fellow East German. This sense of displacement is reflected in *Aller Welt Freund* (1982),[3] Becker's only novel with no fixed spatial location, contrasting strongly with its very definite temporal setting of a single week in October 1980.

In addition to the problems Becker faced trying to establish a political identity and sense of citizenship in the West, he found also that his identity as a writer was destabilised in the post-*Tendenzwende* literary discourse of the 1980s. As a younger generation of authors emerged, rejecting the notion that intellectuals should adopt a moral role as 'conscience of the nation', Becker found that his understanding of what it meant to be a writer was fundamentally challenged. In his 1989 series of essays, *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller*, Becker undertakes a reassessment of his literary values and his identity as an author in an attempt at repositioning himself in the new literary discourse.

Hence the *Wende* period becomes a time of mixed emotions for Becker. For many East German intellectuals such as Christa Wolf and Volker Braun, the readiness of the majority of East German citizens to embrace the capitalist values of the West, something which became abundantly clear with the result of the March 1990 elections at the latest, precipitated a fundamental crisis of his political identity. Not only were the reformists forced to revise their utopian hopes for the future, they were also faced with uncomfortable evidence that the sense of identification they had felt with the East German population as striving together for a democratised but still socialist GDR had been naïve and unrealistic long before the country's demise. This disillusionment severely undermined their sense of purpose as writers. Becker, however, had already come to terms with this realisation and had redefined his identity as a writer in less political terms during the 1980s. For him, the

[3] *Aller Welt Freund* was not published until 1983 in the GDR.

eventual collapse of the Soviet Union and with it any hope that Gorbachev's liberal reform policies could succeed, represented far more of a blow. Indeed Becker did not re-engage in political debate on any meaningful level from this point onwards, claiming it would be futile.

The demise of the GDR did, however, have complex implications for Becker's identity as a German, not least in the loss of the possibility that he could, theoretically at least, return to the GDR. The fact that Becker had chosen to retain his GDR citizenship throughout his time living in the West shows that he would not have voluntarily relinquished this part of his identity. Becker's final novel, *Amanda herzlos* (1992), is set in the GDR during the years Becker was living in the West and as such represents an attempt to regain the time he lost there. Yet as Becker had long been disillusioned with East German socialism, the demise of the GDR itself did not represent the loss of a 'besseres Deutschland' for him. Moreover, as the society around him was suddenly confronted with the question of what it meant to be German and with the problems of defining one's national identity in such a destabilised context, Becker found the issues which had hitherto alienated him from both East and West Germany were now at the heart of social discourse in the new Federal Republic. His 1994 television series, *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk*, shows Becker's genuine desire to engage with this new dominant discourse and suggests he is able to reposition himself in the emerging society in a synthesis of his East and West German identities. Although Becker never recovers his earlier political optimism, on a personal level he is able to reconcile himself to the tensions and differences inherent to his identities as Jew, writer and German and begins to view these complexities as important parts of an inescapably multilayered self. Regrettably, Becker died of cancer in March 1997 before he had the opportunity to test the longer-term validity of this new sense of stability.

0.2 Literature Review

As we have seen, the possibility of making his opinions heard and being able to influence the discourse around him was key to Becker's understanding of what it meant to be a writer and a citizen, and accordingly he gave numerous interviews throughout his life to both academic and mainstream media. This thesis draws particularly on the interview Richard Zipser conducted with Becker in 1978 for information regarding his early political

development, while interviews in *Der Spiegel* from the late 1970s and early 1980s offer valuable insights into the degree of personal and professional upheaval Becker experienced at this time. Comments in his final interview just weeks before his death, also conducted for *Spiegel* by Herlinde Koelbl, form a useful comparison with these earlier interviews to evaluate the shifts and changes in Becker's identities over this time.

Chaim Shoham's influential essay of 1986, 'Jurek Becker ringt mit seinem Judentum', is one of the first to tackle the theme of identity in Becker's works, specifically that of his Jewish identity as it emerges in *Der Boxer*. For Shoham (p. 226), Becker's choice of writing in the German language is simultaneously the rejection of his Jewish identity and the attempt at creating a German identity for himself in its place. Although the analysis of the essay is limited to a single novel and by the constraints of space, it raises many interesting questions about Becker's identity which are taken up by later studies. The 1980s also saw the publication of the first monograph on Becker, Susan Johnson's *The Works of Jurek Becker: A Thematic Analysis* (1988). This offers a brief exploration of some recurrent themes in Becker's work, such as those of resistance and storytelling, but is limited in its scope, not least because it was written too early to give an idea of Becker's development into and beyond the *Wende* period.

In the 1990s four edited volumes appeared on Becker. A *Goethe-Institut* volume edited by Karin Graf and Ulrich Konietzny, and Heinz Ludwig Arnold's *Text + Kritik* edition on Becker both contain excellent interviews in which Becker discusses various aspects of his relationship to the former GDR, including his childhood and his early development as a writer there. His retrospective comments here are largely consistent with the views he expressed in the late 1970s.

Irene Heidelberger-Leonard's volume of 1997 on Becker provides an excellent overview of his life and work with ten reprinted articles and eleven original contributions in addition to a selection of Becker's own essayistic works.[4] In addition to Jürgen Egyptien's chapter on Jewishness and the tradition of storytelling (pp. 279-87), which is discussed in Chapter One, this thesis benefited in particular from Frauke Meyer-Gosau's 1992 interview with Becker included here (pp. 108-22), in which he discussed in detail many of the tensions in his relationship with the SED that ultimately led to his

[4] The first edition was published in 1992. For this second edition the bibliography has been updated. Although not as exhaustive as the bibliography in the Riordan volume mentioned below, it is nevertheless very extensive and the secondary literature is usefully sub-divided into different sections relating to Becker's individual works.

disillusionment with GDR socialism and which forms the basis of some of the discussion in Chapter Four. Marianne Birmbaun's 1988 interview with Becker published in the same volume (pp. 89-107) contains many revealing comments about his difficulty establishing a sense of *Heimat* in West Germany and provided useful background information for Chapter Three.

Colin Riordan's volume of 1998 in the Contemporary German Writers series has proved a valuable resource in writing this thesis. It contains the most comprehensive bibliography on Becker published to date (compiled by Paul O'Doherty) and an interview conducted just eighteen months before Becker's death, which reveals the continuing complex relationships between his German and Jewish identities (pp. 12-23). O'Doherty's examination of *Bronsteins Kinder* (1986) as an example of the identity crises faced by Jews in post-Shoah Germany (pp. 45-56) is drawn upon significantly in the first chapter of this thesis, while Rhys Williams's insightful chapter on the hitherto relatively unexplored *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller* (pp. 85-93) provided some interesting discussion points for Chapter Three.

Also published in 1998 (although completed in 1996, prior to Becker's death), Thomas Jung's study *'Widerstandskämpfer oder Schriftsteller sein...': Jurek Becker - Schreiben zwischen Sozialismus und Judentum*, is the first monograph on Becker after the *Wende*. It is also the first monograph to take identity as its primary focus, specifically the tension between Becker's identities as a Jew and as a socialist or anti-fascist German (the latter two terms are used interchangeably), which Jung views as mutually exclusive. Jung's investigation is based on analyses of Becker's Jewish works and the film adaptations of them, the latter providing a valuable exploration of an area of Becker's work which had hitherto received comparatively little critical attention. However, the omission of such overtly political texts as *Schlaflose Tage* from a study which aims to examine Becker's socialist identity means that important elements of Becker's political development are inevitably overlooked. Jung offers an elegant discussion of the ways in which Becker uses his writing to rediscover or even reinvent his forgotten Jewish past, yet the picture Jung presents of Becker's Jewish identity lacks overall coherence. Identities are understood as multiple and variable, but Jung argues they are all constructions created and selected by a subject for himself and thus he can equally choose to give them up at any time (p. 16). Indeed, Jung specifically rejects the definition of identity this thesis will follow, namely that it is constructed by and through difference and social discourse and externally

projected onto a subject,[5] although much of his analysis contradicts his theory by interpreting characters' Jewish identities as externally imposed social constructions (p. 150). Jung reads Becker's 1977 essay 'Mein Judentum' as a denial by Becker of his Jewish identity and claims Becker was a successfully assimilated German and socialist until 1990 when, both suddenly and surprisingly, he reverts to a Jewish identity with the publication of his essay 'Die unsichtbare Stadt' (p. 14). Yet the texts through which Jung analyses Becker's Jewishness were all produced prior to this essay at a time when he claims Becker's Jewish identity was almost entirely repressed in favour of his socialist identity. This thesis refutes Jung's claim and aims to show that the role of difference and social discourse in identity construction was a central preoccupation of Becker's. The ways in which Becker sought to subvert and manipulate these imposed identities through his literary efforts forms a major focus of the thesis. One key piece of secondary literature to inform this thesis with regard to Becker's manipulation of his Jewish identity through the medium of fiction is Chloe Paver's excellent chapter on *Jakob* in her 1999 book *Narrative and Fantasy in the post-war German Novel* (pp. 117-163).

The most recent analytical study of Becker's work, David Rock's *Jurek Becker: A Jew who became a German?* (2000), also takes up the theme of identity. As the first monograph to be written after 1997, Rock's book is well-placed to produce the reassessment of Becker's career as a whole which his death necessitated and as such it is also the first study to evaluate the full body of Becker's published work. In addition to analysing Becker's prose fiction, Rock undertakes a detailed exploration of his essayistic writing and his scriptwriting for television. Moreover, as Rock had already worked for some years on various aspects of Becker's writing, he is able in this book to offer unique insights from private correspondence and interviews he had conducted with Becker. However, there are some significant gaps in the book which are worthy of further attention. Despite the title, a full picture of Becker's identities as a 'Jew' and 'German' is not developed within the text. The introduction poses some fascinating questions regarding the various complexities of Becker's position as an author of Jewish origin in a post-war German context, but the analysis of the later chapters is not always focused on these issues. An early chapter on *Jakob* (which comprises almost one quarter of the length of the volume, pp. 35-68) offers a sophisticated and detailed analysis of issues of German-Jewish identity arising from this novel and Chapter One of this thesis draws strongly on Rock's

[5] A detailed definition of the model of identity used in this thesis forms the focus of section 0.4.

excellent analysis here. Yet this contrastive analysis is not developed in the sections of the monograph devoted to Becker's later Jewish works, examined together in a single, shorter chapter with an emphasis on generic Jewish elements rather than specific Jewish identities within the texts (pp. 69-98). Indeed, at times the analysis tends to underplay the tensions inherent to Becker's identity as a Jew, such as at the point where Rock claims that Becker's essay 'Mein Judentum' can be interpreted as a denial of his Jewishness (p. 75). Similarly, the short chapter, most of which is dedicated to the post-1989 period, discussing Becker as a socialist writer in the West fails to address the fundamental crisis of identity Becker experienced with regard to his writing and his sense of *Heimat* in the 1980s. (pp. 123-38) The final chapter which focuses on Becker's success as a television scriptwriter at that time (pp. 139-54) suggests this move was an almost wholly positive experience for Becker and claims that his return to the medium of television arose from Becker's feeling of being engaged in a more worthwhile venture here than in the production of prose fiction. This thesis will argue that in fact the opposite is true and will aim in general to engage in greater depth with the questions raised by Rock's book in a more systematic and differentiated way.

That Becker is an author who continues to fascinate readers, academics and critics alike is shown not least by the continuing steady production of secondary literature to his life and works. In 2002 Sander Gilman, who had had access to Becker's *Nachlaß* via his family before it was given to the *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin in 2000, published his detailed biography of Becker, the most thorough factual account of Becker's life to be produced to date. Gilman's text was a valuable resource here particularly for the sections dealing with Becker's childhood. In the same year the *Akademie der Künste* published a collection of documents from Becker's archive under the title *Wenn ich auf mein bisheriges zurückblicke, dann muß ich leider sagen.*[6] The volume, compiled by Karen Kiwus, presents a cross-section of his biography and work as a novelist, essayist, and scriptwriter for both film and television. It is another useful source of information on Becker's childhood and on his move West as it also contains correspondence between Becker and GDR state officials such as Höpcke from the late 1970s.

[6] This title is a quote taken from a postcard Becker wrote. See note 8 below.

0.3 Aims and Structure of the Thesis

As the first study of Becker's works to draw on his extensive archive at the *Akademie der Künste* (which has been fully accessible since November 2001), this thesis aims to present a fuller picture of the question of identity in Becker's life and works than previous studies have been able to provide. In particular, it offers analyses of some of Becker's unpublished work written as early as the 1950s available in the archive. In addition to sources from Becker's *Stasi* files held in the archives of the *Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR* (BStU) and records from the *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisation der DDR im Bundesarchiv* (SAPMO),[7] these unpublished texts allow the thesis to explore Becker's literary and political development at an earlier stage than is possible via a consideration of only his published works which, crucially, all appeared after Becker claimed to have become disillusioned with the GDR's real existing socialism due to the country's involvement in the crushing of the Prague Spring. Throughout the thesis archive sources have been used where appropriate to provide a factual context for analyses of Becker's fiction, essays and comments in interviews.

This study also adopts a new, thematic approach to exploring the issue of identity in Becker's work and examines separately his four competing identities of Jew, writer, German and socialist in parallel chapters. Within this framework the thesis aims to present a differentiated picture of the shifts and developments in each individual identity and also investigate the ways in which they interact, complement and conflict with each other. In order to achieve this, Becker's texts have, for the main part, been analysed in the chapter relating to the identity for which they hold the most significance, although some texts, such as *Irreführung der Behörden*, are examined in two chapters from dual perspectives. Such a categorisation of these texts is, of course, inherently controversial and many of the works could arguably be read as representative of more than one or even of all the identities discussed here. However, in the interests of clarity and of presenting more cohesive analyses of the individual texts, the attempt has been made to examine them as far as possible from the perspective of a single identity. The intrinsically problematic nature of this task is in itself indicative of the complexities inherent in any study of identity, and Becker's case is more complicated than most.

[7] See section 6.1 of the bibliography for a more detailed explanation of how these archives are used and referenced in the thesis.

Chapter One analyses Becker's identity as a Jew and argues that he uses his early writing to try to reject this identity. In *Jakob* Becker seeks to create a multifaceted cast of characters as a reaction against the tendency of GDR literature about the Holocaust to portray Jewish figures as passive, helpless victims. Moreover, Becker seeks here to subvert the notion of 'the Jew' in an attempt to reject the unwanted Jewish social identity projected on to him in the GDR. The continuing position of Jews as outsiders in (East) German society is also seen in *Der Boxer*, where the protagonist Aron Blank is neither able nor willing to assimilate, as the sense of difference between Shoah victims and German perpetrators is still felt too strongly. This novel is strongly autobiographical as Becker uses it to explore his relationship with his late father and with his own Jewish origins, which they had never discussed. The difficulties Becker faces in accessing these roots is the focus of 'Mein Judentum' and 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', both written in the late 1970s where, in contrast to *Jakob*, we see how Becker has internalised his Jewish social identity and seeks to identify with this forgotten past. However, his lack of memory on the one hand, and the death of the older generation severing the final physical link to this time on the other, render the task of remembering impossible for Becker and his protagonists. The theme of generational conflict remains central to Becker's writing in *Bronsteins Kinder*. Despite his aversion to all things Jewish, including hearing stories of his own family's suffering, protagonist Hans Bronstein is perceived as a Jew in the post-war German consciousness and is forced to contemplate this part of his identity. Much of Becker's later essayistic work similarly focuses on the problems of his Jewish past. This chapter suggests that while Becker never recovers his lost childhood memories, although at times he appears desperate to do so, he eventually sees these tensions and complexities as integral parts of his complicated Jewish identity in themselves.

Chapter Two examines Becker's development as a writer, starting with an analysis of his cabaret texts written in the late 1950s, which show that Becker was initially optimistic about his future as a writer in the GDR. Becker claimed his motivations for becoming an author were a combination of a personal desire for self-expression and the political desire to be able to influence and shape society. *Irreführung der Behörden*, with its central theme of self-censorship, suggests that even before the thaw in GDR cultural policy in the early 1970s, Becker feels able to remain in the GDR and retain his integrity as a writer. However, as he experiences mounting pressure to conform not only to the expectations of the state, but also from the GDR readership, which views literature as a

source of *Lebenshilfe*, Becker finds his position in the GDR untenable and moves West in an attempt to regain control over his work. (Self-)censorship remains a primary concern for Becker in *Nach der ersten Zukunft* (1980) and this chapter argues that Becker experienced a fundamental crisis of identity as a writer in the West. In the depoliticised literary discourse of the 1980s, Becker finds his inherently political understanding of what it means to be a writer is severely challenged and, as he continues to be projected into the role of GDR dissident, Becker feels no less pressured to conform to external expectations here than in the East. This chapter argues that it is as a result of these conflicting pressures and the shifting literary discourse that Becker temporarily abandons prose fiction for the less demanding medium of television. *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller* heralds Becker's resolution of this identity crisis as he addresses in turn the conditions for authors in both German societies before turning to the contemporary role of the writer. By constructing a paradoxical notion of the ideal writer, who is able to influence social processes while remaining untouched by the pressures these processes exert, Becker is able to reconcile himself to the contradictory nature of his identity as a writer. In *Amanda herzlos* he invents a version of this idealised writer in the title character and clearly delights in manipulating his own identity as an author, this time by reworking his experiences as a writer in the GDR.

Chapter Three focuses on Becker's identity as a German and argues that this is inherently complicated from the outset. Growing up in the GDR, Becker was aware from early childhood of a sense of difference from his peers, encouraged not least by his father to maintain a distance from the nation responsible for their suffering. Yet at the same time, Becker feels a desire to assimilate, something he is only able to achieve superficially by constructing a false German identity for himself and concealing his past as a victim. Nevertheless, Becker does begin to feel a sense of *Heimat* in the GDR, which he perceives in positive political terms as something which transcends the historical notion of Germanness he inherited from his father. This affinity is then called into question as Becker chooses to leave the GDR for West Germany. In *Nach der ersten Zukunft* we see how a period of international travel forces Becker to consider his relationship to both German societies. His reluctance to relinquish his East German citizenship belies a continuing desire to belong to this 'besseres Deutschland' as he fails to establish an affinity to the West. Here, Becker's experiences of anti-Semitism cause him to remain 'heimatlos', a sentiment which is expressed through the spatial ambiguity of his first novel to be written

in the West, *Aller Welt Freund.* Becker, like many other East Germans, suffers a crisis of identity following the *Wende* and the subsequent loss of the GDR citizenship he had fought so hard to retain and from which he now tries to distance himself. However, this chapter argues that Becker's obvious desire to engage with the contemporary problems Germany faces as a result of the *Wende*, firstly in *Amanda herzlos*, then in the television series *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk* (1994), suggests he now seeks to embrace his German identity and discovers a feeling of *Heimat* in the new Germany.

In Chapter Four Becker's identity as a socialist is examined, beginning with an analysis of archive material discussing his early political development in the GDR. Under the influence of his father, who believed in the inherent goodness of the Russians for their part in freeing him from the Nazis rather than on the basis of any political conviction, Becker grew up to be a convinced socialist. This chapter shows that his loyalty to the SED, of which he became a member in 1955, and to the GDR as the antifascist successor to the Third Reich, was founded in genuine ideological commitment which remained unfaltering until the GDR's participation in the brutal crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968. In *Schlaflose Tage* we see him undertake a fundamental reassessment of his political identity, while in *Nach der ersten Zukunft* Becker seeks to distance himself unequivocally from the SED and its politics. However, this chapter argues that Becker's disillusionment with his former party represents a positive development for him at this point, as he now aspires towards what he perceives to be a more moderate form of socialism. While Becker remains politically frustrated and isolated in West Germany during the 1980s as he cannot find any positive political points of identification, this is overcome with the ascendancy of Gorbachev as leader of the Soviet Union in the latter part of the decade. For Becker, Gorbachev represents a brand of humanist socialism which transcends any narrow concept of German politics and hence this chapter argues that it is not the demise of the GDR, rather that of Soviet Union and with it Gorbachev's reformist policies, which finally spell the end of Becker's socialist aspirations. Unlike his former break with the politics of the SED, this disillusionment is wholly negative for Becker and he withdraws almost entirely from any form of political engagement.

The thesis concludes with an examination of the interplay between the four identities as they conflict with and complement each other. In general, we can observe a shift in Becker's focus from political to primarily more personal concerns. At the same time his approach to the problem of identity becomes increasingly playful as he

manipulates various facets of his own identity within his work. Although at times he would still seek to reject social identities imposed on him, on the whole Becker embraces the tensions and contradictions within his identities as integral parts of a complex and multilayered self.

0.4 Jurek Becker and the Post-modern Identity Model

In recent years the question of identity construction has been at the centre of much academic discourse. As the societies we inhabit become increasingly diverse and simultaneously more global in their outlooks, the questions of what it means to be an individual, of who and what we are, are of paramount importance in enabling us to 'fit in' to these societies. As Paul Gilroy suggests, 'identity provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed'. (Gilroy 1997: 301)

While the importance of identity seems now to be accepted universally, the definition of what we actually mean by the term identity is constantly being disputed, revised and redefined. The last century saw the erosion of the essentialist concept of a unitary, singular self located in a stable world upon which it can act, a concept which is most famously encapsulated in René Descartes's maxim 'I think, therefore I am'. Now post-modern thought has rejected this concept of a unified, fixed self. In his essay *Who needs Identity?* Stuart Hall argues against essentialist concepts of identity in favour of a strategic and positional approach. Hall correctly claims that:

> identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (Hall: 1996: 4)

In this definition of identity the self has been deconstructed, or decentred, meaning that we now have to think of identities not in isolation, but as constructed through and within discourse, and 'discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed'. (Sarup 1996: 18) When, as individuals, we narrate our stories to others we 'include, exclude, stress and subordinate different elements'. (Sarup 1996: 16) These elements will, in turn, vary according to the speaker's audience and the situation in which he is narrating his story and then, 'when these narratives are in the public sphere, they shape us'. (Sarup

1996: 18) In his excellent introduction to cultural studies Chris Barker claims 'identities are wholly social constructions and cannot 'exist' outside of cultural representations and acculturalization'. (Barker 2000: 165) Barker goes on to discuss the issue of 'subjectivity', defining this as:

> the condition of being a person and the processes by which we become a person, that is how we are constituted as subjects. As subjects, that is, as persons, we are 'subject to' social processes which bring us into being as 'subjects for' ourselves and others. The conceptions we hold of ourselves we may call **self-identity**, while the expectations and opinions of others form our **social-identity**. (Barker 2000: 165)

Of course, these two identities within the individual can by no means be detached or seen as separate from each other, for while 'identity may be conceived of as our project, it is a sociological truism that we are born into a world that pre-exists us. [...] We are constituted as individuals in a social process using socially shared materials'. (Barker 2000: 167)

A further feature of the post-modern definition of identity is the claim that identities are constructed through, not outside difference. Although it is true that identities can be constructed through identification, through a feeling of sameness with a specific social or cultural group, it must also be understood that these groups can only exist by being different to those outside them. Stuart Hall argues correctly that:

> it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside,* that the 'positive' meaning of any term – and thus its identity – can be constructed. [...] Throughout their careers identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render outside. (Hall 1996: 4-5)

Thus Hall maintains that we can only read identities 'against the grain' meaning 'specifically *not* as that which fixes the play of difference in a point of origin and stability, but as that which is constructed in or through *différance* and is constantly destabilized by what it leaves out'. (Hall 1996: 5) The French term *différance*, from Derrida's theory of deconstruction, has the dual meanings of 'difference' and 'deferral' in English, whereby meaning is unstable and never complete since the production of meaning is continually deferred and added to by the meanings of other words. Similarly, and in slightly less complicated terms, Madan Sarup draws on these perspectives of identity being formulated through and within both discourse and difference to argue that 'identity is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accomplished by a certain absence, without which it would not

exist. [...] What is important in identity is not only what it cannot say, but also what it cannot be'. (Sarup 1996: 24)

If we observe the importance of both discourse and difference in identity formation it becomes clear that any study of identity must be 'localised in space and time'. (Sarup 1996: 15) When we consider someone's identity we do so not in the abstract, but in relation to the social, personal and political dynamics and discourses that surround it. Yet these dynamics and discourses are no less subject to change than identity is itself. What we consider to be the other, and thus a threat, today, may in the future become a point of identification and *vice versa.* These elements of discourse and difference also shape identities through power and politics, as different social dynamics, such as race, gender, class, etc., carry certain stigma or offer their members privileged positions within a hierarchy. The transitory nature of all these elements once again emphasises the need to locate identity in space and time.

In summary, identity is not a fixed, unitary entity, rather it is something we create and which is created by, and for, ourselves and others. Identity is never fixed, but constantly fluctuating and 'in process'. This decentred notion of the self now leads us to see identity as constructed through and within discourse, by narratives we tell about ourselves and those others tell of us. Thirdly, identity (and identification with a particular group or ideology) can only exist because of difference, because of what it is not and cannot be, and it is thus subject to the play of social dynamics and the politics of power. Hence it becomes evident that due to the impermanent nature of these factors any successful study of identity must be localised in space and time and cannot be thought of merely in the abstract.

As an author, Becker showed himself to be very aware of the transitory nature of identity from his earliest works onwards. In his first novel, *Jakob der Lügner*, Becker adopts an anti-essentialist approach to identity in that he deconstructs the notion that there is a fixed, predetermined Jewish identity. Becker juxtaposes practising Jews with atheistic German Nationalists who happen to have Jewish origins to subvert the stereotypical Nazi definition of Jew that has been applied to all these characters. Indeed, the fundamental principle of this post-modern identity concept, namely that there is no such thing as a predetermined, fixed, stable self, is particularly applicable to Becker's own history. His lack of memory of his early childhood meant that Becker had no access to this past and as such he felt his post-war self identity to be wholly empty and unformed. Becker is quite

explicit about this, referring to his childhood self as 'derjenige, der ich damals war'. (EG: 11) Although any new identity we construct or adopt must inevitably be a development of one or several earlier identities, and Becker already carried multiple social identities based on this forgotten period, it is clear that he felt in retrospect that at the age of seven he was faced with what seemed like the challenge of constructing his identity afresh, starting with a blank page.

This conscious acquisition of identity is nowhere mirrored more clearly than in *Der Boxer*, arguably Becker's most autobiographical novel. Like Becker, Mark Blank, the young protagonist of the novel, is reunited with his father, Aron, after they have survived separate concentration camps. In the novel Becker portrays the first conversation Mark and Aron have, where Aron tries to explain to Mark that he is his father and although Mark is (unlike Becker) able to speak German, he is ignorant of the concepts of 'father' and 'son'. In his acquisition of new vocabulary (as with Becker's own acquisition of the German language), Mark takes on a new identity, as he learns his name and thus his relationships to those around him, he literally becomes Mark Blank. Although Becker's own parentage was never in question, in *Der Boxer* Mark has two possible family names. Here Becker emphasises how Mark's identity is largely a social construction, as he assumes the identity of Blank rather than the other alternative, Berger. The implication is clearly that it could just have easily have been the other way round.

The concept of identity as a synthetic construction, as something created largely by social discourse, is also a theme Becker dealt with frequently in his writing, not least because he felt himself to be a victim of this at times. Despite his best efforts to rid himself of the stigma of being a Jew and a victim of fascism in post-war Germany through his literary subversions of these identities, as mentioned above with reference to *Jakob*, Becker admitted in 'Mein Judentum' that social discourse played an important role in identity construction, accepting that others would continue to see him as a Jew. Indeed, most of Becker's central characters are portrayed only by others, with *Ich-Erzähler* and protagonist separated in such a way that the reader only sees the narrator's depiction of him, rather than that character's self-representation. In *Irreführung der Behörden* Becker tackles this theme explicitly through the way in which his protagonist Gregor Bienek invents a story about a group of mourners at a funeral discussing the man they had just buried. Each person gives a picture of the man that is different to and often irreconcilable with that of

the next. They are unable to decide whose version is the 'correct' one as they continue to shape and change the man's identity through their narratives even after his death.

Furthermore, through the way in which he presents his characters, Becker recognises the mutual interplay and influence between self identity and social identity. In *Jakob*, the protagonist is in turn revered and vilified by his peers as he is seen first as their saviour and then their executioner. Jakob has constructed a false identity for himself and is then forced to live up to it as he internalises the discourse to which this false identity has given rise. In this process he assumes a new, almost divine identity in place of his old anonymous position in the ghetto and then unnecessarily accepts responsibility for the death of the ghetto inhabitants. Fritz Hetmann, the second narrator of *Amanda herzlos*, meets a similar fate. As a critical writer, he is projected into the role of dissident in the GDR, by both the state and the reading public, and finds that despite having struggled so long against state censorship to maintain control over his writing, he now conforms fully to the demands made of dissident authors by the readership. He is no longer able to write autonomously and has thus failed in his pursuit of artistic independence.

Hetmann, as is the case with his two co-narrators in *Amanda*, represents one of Becker's numerous literary attempts at constructing alternative identities for himself, something he treated almost as a game. Indeed Becker admitted that he never tired of imagining himself as somebody else and the three male narrators in *Amanda* can be seen as a playful self-irony on his part. While Becker resented the discourse which defined him as a Jew and a victim on the one hand, he freely manipulated it on the other hand to create new possible identities through narrative. Gregor Bienek in *Irreführung der Behörden* represents an exploration of the choice Becker was faced with earlier as a GDR writer as to whether to follow the path of conformity or strive for artistic independence. The young boy in 'Die Mauer' (1980), who with his friend escapes from a holding camp into the recently emptied ghetto to hunt for left-behind toys, can similarly be read as a literary attempt by Becker to recreate a forgotten part of his past and thus to fill a gap in an unknown childhood. Becker freely admitted that at times he experienced a blurring of memory and invention, of fact and fiction, no longer sure which events had actually happened and which he had imagined so often as to consider them as real memories. This very process of narrating our own history in itself contributes to shaping our identities. When we choose which events of our life to narrate and which elements to stress or subordinate 'we are

constantly constructing and revising our personal stories and so reconstructing ourselves'. (Craib 1998: 2)

Becker's writing also displays his keen understanding of the importance of difference and otherness in identity construction, something which is particularly prominent in his novels which deal with a Jewish thematic. In *Der Boxer* Aron's ultimate disintegration is the inevitable result of his inability to overcome his past and accept his current situation in the GDR. More dramatically, Arno's death in *Bronsteins Kinder* is a consequence of his continuing position as an outsider in post-war (East) German society, a position he shares with Aron and the narrator of *Jakob.* Their pasts mean that they are still seen as victims of fascism, signifying Germans as perpetrators through their otherness. This sense of difference was common for Becker. He lived as a victim in the land of perpetrators, a Polish Jew amongst Germans. He grew up to become a dissident in the strictly regulated GDR, which he eventually left to live in western capitalism as a socialist and an East German. These complex social and political diversities should not be reduced to crude binary opposites, but they serve to show that Becker constantly had a heightened awareness of the Other.

In conclusion then, I hope to have demonstrated not only the appropriateness of the post-modern identity model as a tool for analysing Becker's writing, but also Becker's awareness of the shifts in his own identity, of the multifaceted and fragile nature of identity itself. That Becker never tired of imagining himself as another, of playfully manipulating identities and exploring other possible courses his life could have taken, is perhaps best demonstrated in his unpublished text 'Lebenslauf', which serves as a template on which Becker can fill in the gaps, creating endless new identities for himself as he chooses.[8]

Ich wurde am in als zweites von insgesamt.

Mein Vater war, meine Mutter.

Die Verhältnisse, in denen wir, waren nicht sonderlich, doch besteht kein Grund.

Da meine Eltern und folglich auch ich, steckten uns die Eroberer, wo wir bis zum Ende.

Die Erinnerungen an diese sind, bedingt durch mein jeniges, nur äußerst.

[8] A revised and much shorter version of this text was sent by Becker on a postcard to his friend Joachim Sartorius in November 1996, over a decade after the original text here was written. A quotation from this postcard is used by the *Akademie der Künste* as the title for their 2002 volume on Becker. See Kiwus (2002: 232)

Nach unserer glücklichen durch die Rote blieb mein Vater aus mir bis heute unerfindlichen in, somit auch ich. Er schickte mich in eine angesehene, wo ich nur am Anfang einige, bedingt durch meine sprachliche, die sich aber im Laufe geben.

Im Jahre bestand ich mit Note mein. Zur gleichen trat ich in die, deren Mitglied ich heute noch.

Nach zweijähriger, über die ich lieber nichts, bewarb ich mich, wo ich auch unmittelbar dem aus der begann.

Zu der ersten war ich, das darf ich bei aller, ein recht gutes. Doch mit ließ mein Interesse, wofür es die verschiedlichsten. Einer davon war zum Beispiel, ein anderer, daß ich inzwischen fand. [...]

Schon vorher hat ich ein wenig, doch nun wandte ich ganz und gar. Meine ersten hatten keinen sonderlichen, und wenn ich ehrlich sein soll, so war sie auch.

Zum Jahre folgte schließlich der erste, der in gewisser Weise. Rückblickend will mir scheinen, daß in das meiste, das ich bisher getrost. Und ich kann nur hoffen, daß mir in Zukunft nicht ähnliche Bedenken.

Im übrigen bin ich und habe zwei, die mir allmählich. (AdK, JBA, 200)[9]

[9] I have abbreviated references to Becker's archive at the *Akademie der Künste* as (AdK, JBA,) followed by the number of the file as it appears in the *Findbuch* there.

Chapter One – Shifting Jewish Identities

1.1 Introduction

The Jewish thematic is the most constant and recurring subject matter to be found in the works of Jurek Becker. His career as a novelist began with the publication of *Jakob der Lügner* in 1969, and his archive at the *Akademie der Künste* holds an unpublished story written in 1962, 'Hinterland', which is set in a ghetto. (AdK, JBA, 101) In 1990, Becker published an essay 'Die unsichtbare Stadt' which deals with his sense of loss towards his Jewish past, and he continued to comment on his Jewish identity in interviews right up to his death in 1997. Of Becker's seven novels, three, namely *Jakob, Der Boxer* and *Bronsteins Kinder*, deal with a Jewish theme and more specifically with Jewishness in a German context. Becker's other novels also occasionally contain direct or indirect references to Jewishness. Similarly, *Nach der ersten Zukunft,* the volume of short stories Becker published shortly after he left the GDR, contains two stories with Jewish subject matter, including 'Die Mauer',[10] which at 42 pages could even be considered a novella rather than a short story.[11] Finally, many of Becker's essayistic works deal also with the theme of Jewishness, and tend to be primarily autobiographical in content. In these texts Becker makes direct references to his understanding of his own Jewishness, to how he is seen as a Jew by others and to his own perceptions of this. Despite his ancestry, Becker did not consider himself to be a Jew, claiming instead to be an atheist and he was angered by those who attempted to classify him as a Jew. To a large extent Becker uses his essayistic work to deny that he has a Jewish identity, yet this claim is belied in particular by the frequency and regularity with which he returns to this thematic.

Something which puzzled Becker as he grew up in the GDR was his father's decision to remain in Germany after the war rather than to emigrate to Israel, the USA, or anywhere but the country which had been the cause of his suffering. Indeed, in the immediate post-war period there were very few Jews in Germany. In 1946 the Association of Jewish Communities in the Soviet sector of Germany registered just 4,639 members in total, with over half this number residing in eastern Berlin (Merritt 1989: 167). However, this figure only includes religious Jews in the sector and fails to account for the large

[10] It is possible that 'Die Mauer' predates *Jakob*, as in Becker's archive at the *Akademie der Künste* there is a film script with the same title. Although the script is undated, it is likely to have been written during Becker's years as a DEFA scriptwriter, so between 1962-69. A film directed by Frank Beyer and based on 'Die Mauer' was made in 1994 with the title *Wenn alle Deutschen schlafen.*

[11] The other story I refer to here is 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte'.

numbers of non-practising Jews present in society, many of whom had chosen to return to Germany from exile after the war in the hope of building a socialist state on the ruins of Hitler's Germany. In these early years it was not only possible but also quite common to hold dual membership of both the Jewish Community and the SED and relations between the two groups were extremely friendly, not least as a result of shared suffering and exile at the hands of the Nazis. Indeed, to many of those who returned from exile in order to pursue political aspirations, their Jewish origins were of little or no importance, Anna Seghers being a key example here (O'Doherty 1997: 26). Similarly, Stefan Heym and Wolf Biermann (whose communist father had been murdered by the Nazis), while attaching greater significance to their Jewish extraction than Seghers, still moved to the GDR in the early 1950s largely for political reasons. Although Becker's father remained staunchly apolitical in any committed sense of the word for the rest of his life, he too felt a natural affinity for the Soviets. For him, they represented simultaneously his liberators and the main line of defence against a resurgence of German anti-Semitism (despite the show trials of the early 1950s, which will be discussed later). He explained to his son that he had chosen to remain in Germany as he felt it to be the place least likely to witness a reappearance of anti-Semitism. (EG: 179)

The founding of the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes* (VVN) in 1947 was an official source of moral and financial support for victims of fascism and, as holders of this special status, Becker and his father received pensions from the state and preferential treatment in matters such as accommodation allocation. However, beyond this victim status, Becker had no connections to his Jewish past. He claimed to have no memories of his life before he was liberated from Sachsenhausen and offered two possible explanations for this: 'Ich glaube im Lager gibt's so gut wie nichts woran man sich erinnern könnte. [...] [D]er Tag war gar nichts, der Tag war grau, der Tag war ein Stück Mauer, ein Stück Häuserbaracke. [...] Das heißt, es gibt nichts zu erinnern.' (Graf & Konietzny 1991: 57) Becker also attributes his lack of childhood memories to the fact that his mother tongue was Polish, a language he forgot immediately after the war as his father insisted on speaking only German with him in an attempt to encourage him to learn German more quickly. 'Wahrscheinlich habe ich mit dem Vergessen der [polnischen] Sprache einen Großteil der Informationen, die in dieser Sprache abgespeichert waren, vergessen.' (Graf & Konietzny 1991: 57) This lack of memory had a further consequence for Becker. Not only was he marked as an outsider in post-war Germany due to his victim

status, he was also isolated amongst other first generation survivors as he had access neither to memories of the Holocaust itself nor to memories of happier times before the war.

As Becker forgot Polish more quickly than he learnt German, he was briefly rendered quite literally speechless, a state which symbolised his relationship with his father, at least where matters of the past were concerned. Becker's father never volunteered any information about the past and consciously avoided allowing his son any contact with his Jewish roots. Becker did not receive any religious instruction or upbringing and his father refused to take him along on his infrequent trips to the synagogue, which Becker suspected were purely social rather than spiritual events for his father in any case. In his 1994 essay 'Mein Vater, die Deutschen und ich', Becker writes of his father:

> Eigentlich war er gar kein Jude, das heißt, ihm lag nicht viel daran, einer zu sein. Aber er versteckte es nie. Ich glaube sogar, daß er sein Judentum oft dicker auftrug, als ihm selbst angenehm war: aus Furcht, für angepaßt gehalten zu werden, also aus Stolz. Einmal sagte er, daß es ihm nie im Leben eingefallen wäre, sich für einen Juden zu halten, wenn es keine Antisemiten gäbe. (EG: 182)

Yet in post-war Germany Becker's father continued to feel 'umzingelt von Feinden' (EG: 179) and brought his son up to feel a strong sense of difference to 'die Deutschen'. (EG: 180) Hence as a child Becker was denied access to his Jewish roots and at the same time discouraged from assimilating or integrating into the society around him. This feeling of otherness was further exacerbated by the fact that he was taller and older than any of his classmates and that for years his imperfect command of the German language continued to mark him out as different.[12] Becker's special status as a victim of fascism merely represented an official confirmation of this position, of his identity as a Jew and a victim and was something he sought to reject throughout his life. As Becker approached adulthood in the early 1950s, two events occurred in the GDR which would have served to heighten this sense of difference.

From 1948 a series of show trials was staged throughout eastern Europe with a large scale anti-Semitic campaign at their centre. The precise reasons for why Stalin should have chosen to stage such trials at this time are unclear. One theory suggests it was in order to assert total Soviet control across the bloc by 'eliminating potential opponents of absolute

[12] See sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 for fuller discussions of Becker's position as an outsider growing up in East Germany.

Soviet power, and at the same time strike fear into the minds of those who survived'. (O'Doherty 1997: 27)[13] From 1950-53, Jews across the GDR were removed from senior posts or arrested and imprisoned on charges such as Zionism, imperialism and cosmopolitanism, the latter here being applied in particular to those who had spent the war in Western exile and were thus deemed to have Social Democratic sympathies. O'Doherty (1997: 31) claims: 'The overall impression is that the Trials were far more about establishing absolute Soviet power than a vendetta against Jews or any other section of the population.' This would hardly have been much comfort to those affected by the anti-Semitic campaigns, however, and in the first few months of 1953, up to one quarter of the GDR's remaining Jewish population fled to the West. (O'Doherty 1997: 39) After Stalin's death in 1953 relations between Jews and the SED became more harmonious, although they were never as positive as before the show trials. In the GDR Jews were officially seen as a religious rather than a national group and as such were no more subject to unfavourable treatment than practising Christians. However, the events of 1953 would not have been quickly forgotten by Becker. If he had no memory of the Holocaust, then as a politically engaged sixteen-year-old who already carried the unwanted social identities of Jew and victim, he would have been all too aware of the anti-Semitic campaigns of the time.

The second significant event of 1953 for Jews in the GDR was the dissolution of the VVN, which had hitherto represented all those persecuted by the Nazis, in favour of a *Komitee der antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer der DDR* which did not represent Jewish victims of the Holocaust. They were now reclassified as *Opfer des Faschismus* and, although this still carried financial privileges, it was clearly an inferior classification to that of *Kämpfer gegen den Faschismus*, the term used to describe the politically persecuted. Moreover, it perpetuated the official line that Jews had been passive victims and were indebted to the rest of (communist) society for freeing them from their suffering.

Becker's preoccupation with this imposed social identity of Jew or victim, which his work suggests were seen as synonymous terms in post-war Germany, features strongly in his Jewish fiction and in several essays. The works discussed here contain common main themes, most prominently the predicament of the Jew in post-war Germany and generational conflicts between Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. The reader can observe a

[13] For a detailed analysis of the show trials in the GDR and across eastern Europe see O'Doherty 1997: 27-45.

progression in Becker's attitudes towards his own Jewish ancestry and that of his literary characters, who often bear striking resemblance to their author. Indeed some critics, including Chaim Shoham in his influential essay 'Jurek Becker ringt mit seinem Judentum', have argued that Becker can be seen as identical to some of his characters. However, I concur with David Rock's argument here: '[k]eine der Beckerschen Hauptfiguren ist aber mit ihrem Autor identisch, denn in seiner Prosa war Becker der Rollenspieler *par excellence*: alle seine "jüdischen" Romane und Erzählungen haben sehr verschiedene Ich-Erzähler, durch die er verschiedene jüdische Identitäten ausprobierte.' (Rock 1998: 39)

This concept of role-playing on the part of Becker is key throughout his writing, and particularly prominent in his Jewish works, as the reader often gains the impression that through his fictive creations Becker tries on identities, almost like clothes, as he experiments with these identities himself. As we noted earlier, Becker barely retained any memories of his childhood and in his 1990 essay 'Die unsichtbare Stadt',[14] he explained: 'Ohne Erinnerungen an die Kindheit zu sein, das ist, als wärst du verurteilt, ständig eine Kiste mir dir herumzuschleppen, deren Inhalt du nicht kennst. Und je älter du wirst, um so schwerer kommt sie dir vor, und um so ungeduldiger wirst du, das Ding endlich zu öffnen.' (EG: 114) Another important facet of Becker's Jewish writing that manifests itself in his 'role-playing', then, is to try to recover, or even reinvent, the lost memories of his childhood.

For Shoham, Becker's writing in the German language is an attempt to take on strictly German identities: 'das Schreiben von Literatur in deutscher Sprache [ist] gleichzeitig Prozeß einer neuen Identitätsnahme und jeder neuer Text, den Becker schreibt, eine Bestätigung dieser neuen Identität'. (Shoham 1986: 226) This eager adoption of a new identity is, argues Shoham, simultaneously a rejection of his earlier, Jewish identity. Yet Shoham also contradicts himself here, claiming that as Becker had no memory of the time before liberation, 'sein Leben und seine Identität [begann] mit der Befreiung aus den Konzentrationslagern, mit seinem endgültigen Seßhaftwerden im heutigen Ostberlin und mit der Annahme der deutschen Sprache'. (Shoham 1986: 227) As David Rock also points out, if Becker's writing is a denial of an earlier, Jewish identity, it cannot also be claimed that his identity only began after liberation from the camp. However, Shoham's

[14] This essay was written as a contribution to the anthology edited by Hanno Loewy and Gerhard Schoenberner (1990): *'Unser einziger Weg ist Arbeit.' Das Ghetto in Łodz 1940-1944*, Vienna, Löcker, 1990.

interpretation here does illustrate the highly complex nature of Becker's attitude towards his Jewishness in the context of post-war Germany.

Indeed, in *Jakob der Lügner* Becker confronts both his unwanted Jewish identity and the official discourse in the GDR which he sees as playing a part in constructing it. In the novel we see Becker's first literary attempts at confronting his (forgotten) past as a Holocaust victim, and the text very much seems to represent a search for identity on Becker's part, along with a rejection of the stigma of a victim identity. A central feature of the novel is the way in which the protagonist's identity is formed almost entirely by the expectations of others, by his social identity, which he internalises and is then forced to live up to. Moreover, through his skilled narrator and diverse characterisation, Becker satirises prejudices and stereotypes to call into question the very concept of 'the Jew'. In this way Becker breaks down, in a literary context at least, the sense of difference between victim and non-victim and thus brings into the (German) public domain a subject matter that had hitherto been taboo for him. Hence Becker is not only attempting to subvert the social identity of Jew imposed on him, *Jakob* is also a reaction against the literary tendency of the time in the GDR to play down the Holocaust in order to highlight examples of communist triumph over Nazism, Bruno Apitz's *Nackt unter Wölfen* being a key example of this style of resistance narrative here.[15] Further, Becker seeks to challenge such literature's depictions of Jews and victims as inherently 'good' and all Germans and Nazis as 'evil'.

Outraged by his son's portrayal of life in a ghetto, Becker's father refused to speak to him for a year after the publication of *Jakob*. Although Becker described his overall relationship with his father as 'recht gut [...] und herzlich' (Hage 1986: 331), we have already noted that they were never able to discuss the Holocaust. After his father's death in 1972, Becker came to bitterly regret never having asked his father about their shared past and *Der Boxer* represents an attempt to evaluate his father's life as a survivor and to retrospectively overcome the silence in their relationship. Here the predicament of the Jew in post-war Germany, a theme only touched on in *Jakob,* comes very much to the forefront, as we see a survivor of the Holocaust struggle, and ultimately fail, to assimilate into (East) German society. Here the protagonist, Aron Blank, is doomed to isolation, as on the one hand he still feels a strong sense of difference between himself and Germans, while on the other he vehemently rejects the identity of Jew, as this carries with it the stigma of

[15] See section 4.2.4 for a fuller discussion of this point.

victim. As with *Jakob,* the character Mark has his identity largely imposed on him, in this case by his father, and it is in that mould that Mark has to grow up. Although the novel has strong autobiographical elements in that it shows a fictionalised portrayal of Becker's relationship with his father, a fundamental point for consideration is the way in which this dysfunctional area of the relationship between Becker and his father, or Mark and Aron, can be seen as representative of the conflict between the two generations of victims, between the first generation which has all too real memories of the Holocaust and younger survivors who have no clear memories and as such feel alienated from both their roots and the contemporary society in which they live.

This thematic of generational conflict is continued strongly through to the late seventies, when *Nach der ersten Zukunft* was written. The parallels between the autobiographical essay 'Mein Judentum' and the short story 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte' are striking as Becker and his narrator struggle to understand their histories or feel affinity to their roots. They too feel alienated from the past and 'Die Mauer' arguably represents Becker's most obvious attempt at recreating a past he cannot remember. Here his skill as a role-player is exemplified, as for the first time Becker creates a story set during the war where the protagonist is the same age as he was himself at that time. The child-narrator's experiences and ways of understanding his surroundings could quite possibly be similar to those of his author.

Hence this chapter will argue that the questions surrounding Becker's Jewish identity continued to be of fundamental importance to him throughout his time in East Germany, despite his claim of 1980 that in the GDR his Jewish background '[hat] so gut wie keine Rolle gespielt'. (Becker 1980: 53) This is indicated not least by his choice to continue to focus his work on his Jewish roots even at a time of tremendous personal and professional turmoil when he had just separated from his wife and left the GDR for the West. Nevertheless, Becker was consistent in his claims that in the West 'ich [bin] gezwungen, mich als Jude zu fühlen' (Becker 1980: 53) and it seems that his Jewishness played an even greater role in constructing his position as an outsider there than had been the case in the GDR. This was due in no small part to the more prolific expressions of anti-Semitism Becker witnessed in the West and which he was even unfortunate enough to become the direct target of.

In Becker's final 'Jewish' novel, *Bronsteins Kinder*, as in *Der Boxer* the stigma of 'Jew' and 'victim' has passed down to the second generation and the sense of conflict and

estrangement between the nineteen-year-old German protagonist, Hans, and his Holocaust-survivor father, Arno, is stronger than ever. Like some of Becker's other characters before him, Hans seeks to deny his Jewish identity and assert a strong German identity in its place. However, Hans fights for this so hard that he calls his Germanness into question in the process. Although the novel is set specifically in East Berlin, it is made quite clear in the text that this is of no consequence to the issue at hand, namely the inability of Jewish survivors/victims to be assimilated into post-war Germany, whichever side of the border they may be. Indeed, the novel implies that social isolation for Jews in West Germany is still more problematic than in the East. While all the novels discussed in this chapter have very specific temporal and spatial settings, the subject matter they deal with transcends narrow, nation-specific issues and the three novels (and to a lesser extent the essays and short stories) carry relevance not only to both Germanys, but also on a universal social level.

1.2 Jakob der Lügner

1.2.1 Wir wollen jetzt ein bißchen schwätzen: The Role of the Narrator

Jakob der Lügner was originally written as a film script. When it was rejected by the studio in Poland where it was due to be filmed, Becker decided to rewrite the story as a novel and thus began his career as an author of prose fiction almost by accident. In an essay for a symposium[16] in 1983, Becker explained that the novel was based on a true story his father had told from his own time in a ghetto about a Jew who had kept a radio hidden, an offence punishable by death, in order to supply his fellow prisoners with daily news on the state of the war. 'He had been a really big hero said my father with tears in his eyes [...]. I also found this man to be a hero but I didn't have the slightest desire to write about him. Because I had often read about this man – thousands of books had already been written about him.' (Becker 1983: 272)[17] Becker subsequently forgot about the story for many years, until one day he had the idea that the man did not really have a radio at all. In the novel, a Holocaust survivor tells the story of Jakob, a fellow ghetto inhabitant who, purely by chance, overhears a news flash on German radio reporting that the Russian Army

[16] Held at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto, April 14-17, 1983

[17] On a form Max Becker filled in for the *Jüdische Gemeinde Berlin* in 1946, he claimed to have been deported for illegally owning a radio and spreading anti-German propaganda. The validity of this claim is highly dubious, as Sander Gilman (2002: 40) shows.

is advancing. In order to stop his friend Mischa behaving in such a foolish way as to risk being killed, Jakob passes the news on to him and, predictably, the entire ghetto soon learns of the Russian advance. Consequently, and at great personal risk, Jakob is forced to pretend he owns a clandestine radio and supply the ghetto grapevine with daily doses of 'news', thus inspiring the inhabitants with hope and the will to live, and causing the once high suicide rate to drop to zero.

Becker felt that written with this extra twist, this did indeed make a good story because it did not follow the usual lines of heroic resistance to the Nazis. Becker, who had grown up and still lived in the GDR when he wrote *Jakob*, felt that 'most readers had already heard too much of the little amount of resistance there had been. [...] Such as I saw it, resistance had no place [in this story].' (Becker 1983: 272) However, Becker's intention was never to set the record straight here by writing an historically accurate account of life in a ghetto, rather he wanted to write 'a story about the value of storytelling, above all in times of misery; whether it can help people to survive, or distract them from the worries they would have been better off taking care of'. (Becker 1983: 272-3) Becker's intentions in writing *Jakob* were also arguably more personal than a desire to contribute a more accurate literary representation of history, rather the research he conducted as a scriptwriter into ghetto life revealed factual details of his own life that had been hitherto unknown or taboo. As part of his research Becker travelled to various archives in Poland, where he found and photocopied his and his parents' ghetto papers, valuable evidence of a forgotten part of his life.

For Becker, then, working on the script for *Jakob* meant something akin to research into his own background, perhaps a first, tentative attempt at unlocking the secret of his childhood and learning a little about his past. In order to accomplish this Becker creates a narrator who clearly delights in his art of storytelling and whose main aim is to tell 'eine ordentliche Geschichte'. (JL: 24) One initial important point to note is that although the narrator, a fellow ghetto inhabitant of Jakob, does indeed share a love of storytelling with his author, the two can by no means be seen as identical. The narrator explains early in the novel 'ich bin sechsundvierzig, einundzwanzig geboren'. (JL: 28) This shows not only that the narrator experienced the ghetto as an adult, seemingly lending his narrative greater validity (although I will argue later that this is not in fact the case), it also clearly locates the novel in 1967. Furthermore, since it firmly establishes a distance between the narrator and his author, Becker is not attempting an autobiographical work in any strict sense. The

novel is far more, as David Rock (2000b: 339) correctly argues, 'a search for identity via linguistic constructs, an attempt, as it were with the key of language itself, to unlock his own repressed memories'.

Initially there is no sign of the narrator's joy in his art; on the contrary he appears rather desperate to get the story off his chest. 'Ich habe schon tausendmal versucht, diese verfluchte Geschichte loszuwerden, immer vergebens.' (JL: 9) And we soon learn also the reasons behind the problem the narrator has had in finding a willing audience for his story. As soon as the narrator broaches the subject, usually with strangers, the listener backs away: 'Aber als der Krieg zu Ende war, war ich gerade erst...' (JL: 27) Despite his need and his willingness to rid himself of this story, the narrator continues to be a victim of the Holocaust, even in the eyes of his most intimate acquaintances: 'Ich liege mit Elvira im Bett. [...] Wir atmen noch schwer, wir haben nie darüber gesprochen, da fragt sie mich plötzlich: "Sag mal, stimmt es eigentlich, daß du..." [...] Weiß der Teufel, wer es ihr erzählt hat, ich höre das Mitleid in ihrer Stimme und werde verrückt.' (JL: 28) David Rock shows how episodes such as these 'demonstrate the inner barrier which is still in place between Holocaust victims and ourselves, "the others" – the danger that in our reaction to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, we automatically create a distance between them and ourselves'. (Rock 2000a: 47) As soon as the narrator begins his story he is seen as a victim, and then by contrast he signifies others as perpetrators. Yet as the narrator is willing to tell his story and it is the audience who is unwilling to listen, it becomes clear that the difference separating the two is felt most keenly on the side of the audience here. As a result of his experiences as a Holocaust victim, the narrator is now forced to carry this social identity with him in post-war Germany. As Manuela Günter (2000: 441) convincingly argues, many victims '[wurden] buchstäblich erst von den Nationalsozialisten zu "Juden" gemacht. [...] Auch diese müssen sich, das zeigen fast alle Texte von Überlebenden, fortan als Juden identifizieren; die Shoah ist zum integralen Bestandteil ihrer Identität geworden'. Günter cites Jean Améry in his essay 'Über Zwang und Unmöglichkeit, Jude zu sein' as a key example of this imposed Jewish identity: 'Da ich kein Jude war, bin ich keiner; und da ich keiner bin, werde ich keiner sein können.' Yet at the same time Améry recognises his Holocaust experiences have made him a Jew: 'Ich muß Jude sein und werde es sein, ob mit oder ohne Religion, innerhalb oder außerhalb einer Tradition, ob Jean, Hans oder Jochanaan.' (Améry 1970: 101) Through his narrator Becker now seeks to undermine this imposed social identity.

After his initial desperation to rid himself of the story, the narrator eventually settles down comfortably and confidently in the role of storyteller. He narrates predominantely in the present tense, creating the impression that the events are still unfolding before our eyes, an effect which serves to draw the reader into the story. Further, the narrator is always keen to prove how seriously he takes his task, how important it is to him to tell the story well. At times he even makes the reader his accomplice, as he draws back from the narrative to 'chat' with the reader: 'wir wollen ein bißchen schwätzen, wie es sich für eine ordentliche Geschichte gehört'. (JL: 26) And later, when it is apparent that Mischa is about to break his word to Jakob and tell his girlfriend about Jakob's radio: 'Wir wissen, was geschehen wird. Wir haben unsere bescheidenen Erfahrungen darin, wie Geschichten mitunter abzulaufen pflegen, wir haben einige Phantasie, und darum wissen wir, was geschehen wird.' (JL: 38) This act of drawing the reader in, of making him almost part of the story, is aided by the narrator's disregard for the conventional rules of narrative perspective. In her excellent chapter on *Jakob* Chloe Paver notes: 'On some occasions [the narrator] adopts the perspective of one of the characters in his story, in the manner of an omniscient narrator. [...] He does this unobtrusively, without drawing attention to the artifice'. (Paver 1999: 121) By offering the reader both eye-witness accounts and access to the thoughts of all characters, a privilege normally only afforded to an omniscient narrator, our narrator breaks down the barriers he has previously experienced when trying to tell this story to other audiences.

Further, as Paver examines in some depth, the novel can almost be read as a series of several short stories, 'and most lead up to some kind of *Pointe*, often with a strange twist of fate or a reversal of expectations'. (Paver 1999: 131) As an example here Paver cites the scene where Mischa tells the Frankfurters that Jakob has a radio, that he will be able to supply constant news updates and that the Russians are advancing. Of course, Mischa expects a joyous reaction; he even hopes to bask in Jakob's reflected glory, yet Frankfurter is outraged by the news. Then the reader learns that Frankfurter himself has hidden a radio in his cellar – if the *Gestapo* heard of the radio and decided to search the ghetto it would be quite possible that Frankfurter's crime would be discovered and that he would pay the ultimate price. This event, and several others like it, 'are designed to invite emotional involvement [yet] they are far from sentimental since the narrator has a keen eye for the quirks and frailties of human nature, which he gently satirises'. (Paver 1999: 131)

1.2.2 Was ist das schon, jüdische Herkunft?

Having established a sense of complicity between the reader and the narrator and broken down the barriers of difference that exist between victim and non-victim, the narrator has drawn the reader into the story almost as a participant. Moreover, the shifting narrative perspectives allow the reader to identify closely with individual characters, brought to life with glorious descriptions, such as the mischievous Kowalski, Jakob's oldest friend. 'Kowalski ist himmlisch. Er hält sich für einen Fuchs und mit allen Wassern gewaschen, dabei kann sein Gesicht nichts verbergen, es ist geschwätzig.' (JL: 42) Whilst Kowalski is often seen as a thorn in Jakob's side, an opportunist who only offers to work with Jakob in order to be the first to hear any news, he also proves himself to be a true and loyal friend when he saves Jakob's life, an act that surprises even Jakob himself. The individuality of such characters mocks the Nazis' attempts at dehumanising the Jews. 'Ihr seid Juden, ihr seid weniger als Dreck.' (JL: 9)

Becker was often angered by the attempts of others to pigeon-hole him into certain categories 'unter anderem eben Jude'. (EG: 15) I argue that here, in creating 'Jewish' characters, Becker challenges not only this unwanted social identity, but also the notion of a universal 'Jewish' identity as discussed with relation to Jean Améry above. Indeed, this was a recurrent theme in the autobiographies of Shoah survivors, such as Laura Waco's *Von Zuhause wird nichts erzählt. Eine jüdische Kindheit in Deutschland* (1996) and Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben. Eine Jugend* (1995). Carmel Finnan shows how these texts read as dialogue both between the authors' German and Jewish selves and between these groups on an intercultural level:

> Implicit in their function as cultural mediators, these texts present personal Jewish histories that challenge the sense of otherness surrounding Jewish identity in German consciousness, particularly since 1945. More precisely, they seek to challenge how Germans perceive Jews as an enigmatic 'other', and, in a sense decode their hermetic experiences as first- and second-generation Shoah survivors for a German audience. (Finnan 2000: 457)

Here on a fictitious level, in the novel he called 'der Versuch des Hauchs einer Autobiographie' (Koelbl 1997: 211), Becker is attempting to undermine this imposed social identity of Jew through his skilfully constructed characters. Firstly, there is the character Professor Kirschbaum, previously a renowned heart surgeon, now imprisoned in the ghetto:

> Kirschbaum hat nie einen Gedanken daran verschwendet, daß er Jude ist. Schon sein Vater war Chirurg, was ist das schon, jüdische Herkunft, sie zwingen einen, Jude zu sein, und man selbst hat gar keine Vorstellung, was das überhaupt ist. Jetzt sind um ihn herum lauter Juden, zum erstenmal in seinem Leben nichts als Juden, er hat sich den Kopf über sie zerbrochen, er wollte herausfinden, was es ist, wodurch sie sich alle gleichen, vergeblich, sie haben untereinander nichts Erkennbares gemein, und er mit ihnen schon gar nicht. (JL: 90)

The system of logic which has identified Kirschbaum as a Jew and condemned him to slave labour and imprisonment is further ridiculed in the scene where Kirschbaum is called upon to save Hardtloff's life. Hardtloff, the head of the *Gestapo*, suffers a heart attack and as the most revered heart surgeon in the area, Kirschbaum and his medical skills are sought. No longer is Kirschbaum told he is 'weniger als Dreck', rather now '[Hardtloff] bittet Sie zu sich'. (JL: 227) This is the only point during the novel where the polite 'Sie' form of address is used by a German speaking to a Jew in the ghetto.

In the case of Schmidt, previously a successful lawyer with his own practice who now in the ghetto is nicknamed 'Assimilinski' (JL: 149), the difference is even more marked:

> In Schmidts Kopf spukt das Ganze als idiotischer Witz, [...] er war auf dem besten Weg, ein deutscher Nationalist zu werden. Aber sie haben ihn nicht gelassen, sie haben an die Tür geklopft und ihn aufgefordert, keine Sperenzchen zu machen, entsetztes Dienstmädchengesicht zwischen den mit weißem Tuch bedeckten Plüschsesseln, sie haben ihn hierhergebracht, weil sein Urgroßvater in die Synagoge gegangen ist und seine Eltern dumm genug waren, ihn beschneiden zu lassen, warum wußten sie schon selber nicht mehr. (JL: 145)

Schmidt even holds the military distinction of being an Iron Cross holder and, as the narrator notes: 'er würde wahrscheinlich gegen das ganze Ghetto kein Wort einzuwenden haben, wenn sie nicht ausgerechnet ihn mit eingesteckt hätten. Wenn er sich Mühe gibt, die Unterschiede zu verwischen, das tut er meistens, wird man den Eindruck nicht los, daß er sich verstellt'. (JL: 152) Although Kirschbaum and Schmidt see nothing that could connect them to the other ghetto inhabitants, they are perceived by others to be Jews and are thus incarcerated and told they are filth and vermin. This contrast between the ways the characters see themselves and are perceived by others demonstrates the perpetual interaction and mutual influence of self identity and social identity within patterns of

discourse, as the characters adapt their behaviour according to the situation in which they find themselves and begin to assimilate into ghetto life. When there is an opportunity to find out the latest news from Jakob, Schmidt behaves no differently to the others: 'plötzlich gleicht er ihnen aufs Haar'. (JL: 149)

Here Becker breaks down not only the Nazi definition of a Jew, he also challenges the essentialist concept of a Jewish identity by juxtaposing characters such as 'Assimilinski' with the devout Herschel Schtamm, who suffers under the heat of a huge woollen hat all summer in order to keep his long hair hidden from the German guards. The inhabitants of the ghetto are not united by any common discourse or ideology, other than those forced upon them. Some are particularly devout, others are atheists. They are united only in that they are 'Leidensgefährten' (JL: 152) and that they share a common enemy in the form of Germans.

Becker is seeking not only to challenge established German perceptions of Jewishness, but also the East German literary discourse which perpetuates it. In line with official state ideology, literary depictions of Jews in the first two decades of the GDR tended to show helpless passive victims, unable to accept the merits of communism because of their bourgeois views. One such figure is Lea Füßler in Max Walter Schulz's *Wir sind nicht Staub im Wind* (1962). The characters in the novel are clearly categorised into 'good' or 'evil', and Paul O'Doherty (1997: 125) cites the book as 'a classic example of how not to portray Jewish figures after Auschwitz'. He dismisses the depiction of Lea as 'a cumulative picture of a beautiful young Jewess whose views are bourgeois and thus worthless - a stereotype which can easily be interpreted as an anti-Semitic one'. (O'Doherty 1997: 128) Claude D. Conter claims that the only truly positive depictions of Jewish figures in GDR literature are those who are prepared to renounce their Jewishness in favour of socialism, such as the title figure in Peter Edel's *Die Bilder des Zeugen Schattmann* (1969). Conter (2000: 304) describes Edel's novel as 'eine Wandlungs- und Entwicklungsgeschichte eines agnostischen Juden zu einem sozialistisch engagierten Bürger, der vor den neofaschistischen Bewegungen in Westdeutschland warnt' and salutes *Jakob der Lügner* with its diverse characterisations as a 'literarische[] Befreiungstat', releasing GDR literature from these clichés in its portrayal of Jews (Conter 2000: 308).

1.2.3 Der Mann, der eine direkte Leitung zum lieben Gott hat.

From the moment Jakob tells Mischa he has a radio, he knows he will no longer be seen as the same person in the ghetto. He feels immediately, 'daß er anders geworden ist'. (JL: 39) He is set apart from the other prisoners by the power afforded to him by his radio, and as the ghetto inhabitants become dependent on Jakob for news, so too they begin to project him into the role of hero. At times, also, Jakob is seen almost as a demi-God. As he is neither tall nor strong, Jakob was never a desirable partner for the heavy lifting work the Jews carry out at the train station, yet when it becomes known that Jakob owns a radio, everyone offers to work with him, 'mit dem Mann, der eine direkte Leitung zum lieben Gott hat'. (JL: 78) And later, when the radio, much to Jakob's delight, is silenced by a power cut, this precipitates another abrupt change in Jakob's identity as he becomes a mere mortal again: 'Erst der Strom wird ihn von neuem allwissend machen.' (JL: 99) From the moment he tells his first lie, namely that he owns a radio, Jakob is elevated to a strange position of authority by the ghetto community. 'Sie benehmen sich wie die Kinder, sie schwirren um einen herum wie die Ausgehlustigen um die Litfaßsäule, wenn nicht ein Wunder geschieht, wird es höchstens noch Stunden dauern, bis die Posten etwas merken.' (JL: 79)

Within this role of hero, or saviour, Jakob constructs a false identity for himself and is then forced to live up to it in order that the other prisoners maintain the will to survive: 'die Hoffnung darf nicht einschlafen, sonst werden sie nicht überleben [...]. Hoffentlich macht der Kopf mit, Erfinden ist nicht jedermanns Sache'. (JL: 84) Jakob continues to invent the stories and tell the lies that will give the Jews the will to live. Insofar as Jakob gives the Jews the chance of a future, he also begins to take on responsibility for the lives of the other prisoners, something which is hinted at in the adult/child analogy in the previous quotation. When Herschel Schtamm is shot attempting to pass on news from Jakob's radio to some deportees passing through their station, Jakob feels responsible, yet when he tries to unburden himself of the radio and the repercussions it has brought by confessing everything to Kowalski, it results in Kowalski committing suicide.

Jakob becomes isolated from the ghetto community. He secretly delights in the respite he receives during the power cut. 'Jakob ist über Nacht eine durchaus gewöhnliche Arbeitskraft geworden, eine ältere Person mit zwei denkbar schwachen Händen, um die sich keiner mehr reißt.' (JL: 100) Yet even though he no longer has to invent the stories, Jakob must sustain the role projected onto him. 'Jakob darf wieder einer von vielen sein,

keiner zwingt ihn, mehr zu wissen als alle, aber verstellen muß er sich weiter.' (JL: 99) Similarly, when Jakob tells Kowalski his radio is broken, he must feign sadness as though he were acting a part in a play: 'Also her mit dem verzweifelten Gesicht, her mit den traurig hängenden Schultern, jetzt kommt der letzte Akt in unserem Fragespiel.' (JL: 142)

In his fictional ending, the narrator fantasises about what would happen if Jakob were simply to decide not to spread any more news: 'der große Mann von gestern sinkt rapide im Ansehen. Feigling wird er geheißen und Scheißkerl, auch deshalb, weil er sich störrisch weigert, das Radio einem anderen zu überlassen [...]. Aus Augen wird er bald angesehen, vor denen man sich fürchten kann, geflüstert wird hinter seinem Rücken, was man besser nicht hört.' (JL: 296) It is assumed that Jakob has also considered this possibility and ruled it out for similar reasons. Indeed, in the 'true' ending, as the ghetto is emptied and all inhabitants deported, the narrator notes 'ich gehe nicht so weit wie einige Dummköpfe, die [Jakob] eine Art Mitschuld an dieser Reise geben, doch ich kann nicht leugnen, daß ich einen ungerechten Groll gegen ihn spüre'. (JL: 316) For Jakob, then, his role has become inescapable. Ironically, he cannot tell the truth about where he heard the first piece of news for fear of arousing unjust suspicion of being a spy, so he lies. This lie gives him a new, almost divine identity yet this lie, and all the ones which follow, cause others to hold a distorted picture of Jakob. It is this false perception that becomes part of Jakob's social identity and is then projected onto him for him to internalise and thus does become part of his self identity. All this ultimately contributes to Jakob's isolation, as he realises this role is irreconcilable with his previous self. 'Man ist seinen Mitbürgern kein Mensch mehr, man ist Besitzer eines Radios, unvereinbar miteinander.' (JL: 218)

1.2.4 Und jetzt stehe ich da mit den zwei Enden: Memory, Invention and Narrative

As we have noted earlier, the narrator was born in 1921 and thus experienced the ghetto as an adult. In creating this age difference Becker not only distances himself from the narrator, but through the first-person narrative of a mature eye-witness also provides the reader with what would appear to be a credible account of events. Indeed, the narrator is keen to prove at every juncture how he came to possess such knowledge:

> Ich möchte gern, noch ist es nicht zu spät, ein paar Worte über meine Informationen verlieren, bevor der eine oder der andere Verdacht sich meldet. Mein wichtigster

> Gewährsmann ist Jakob, das meiste von dem, was ich von ihm gehört habe, findet sich hier irgendwo wieder [...]. Immerhin erzähle ich die Geschichte, nicht er, Jakob ist tot und außerdem erzähle ich nicht seine Geschichte, sondern eine Geschichte. (JL: 49)

In other places too the narrator explains how he returned to the town after the war and conducted his own research into parts of the story he was still unsure of, thus making his story more credible. At times, however, he admits to filling in gaps in the story with nothing but his own imagination:

> Einiges weiß ich noch von Mischa, aber dann gibt es ein großes Loch, für das einfach keine Zeugen aufzutreiben sind. Ich sage mir, so und so muß es ungefähr gewesen sein, oder ich sage mir, es wäre am besten, wenn es so und so gewesen wäre, und dann erzähle ich und tue so, also ob es dazugehört. Und es gehört auch dazu, es ist nicht meine Schuld, daß die Zeugen, die es bestätigen könnten, nicht mehr aufzutreiben sind. (JL: 49-50)

For Rock, these claims of accuracy combined with admissions of his own limitations make the narrator's story all the more credible. (Rock 2000a: 38) However, I argue that the story is actually a deliberately multi-layered account of events which have been told and retold, blurred by the passage of time, by the different levels of narrative and by the unreliability of memory. The narrator's desire to tell an 'ordentliche Geschichte' (JL: 26) has less to do with his love of storytelling than with the need 'diese verfluchte Geschichte loszuwerden'. (JL: 9) Paver points to the use of *Konjunktiv II* combined with many modals and explorations of different possible outcomes of several scenes to illustrate that much of the text is a product of the narrator's imagination. (Paver 1999: 123) In other places the narrator uncovers pieces of information only through third parties.

A further point for consideration is the role of memory in narrative, for 'when we talk about personal history and identity we include, exclude, stress and subordinate different elements'. (Sarup 1996: 16) So again, we cannot take the narrator's account to be an historical truth. Indeed the narrator has only heard of many events from Jakob or Mischa and did not witness them himself. He also refers to his memories as 'fragwürdige Erinnerungen' (JL: 26), something which is key to his motivations for telling his story at all. Here we can look to the significance of the double ending. In addition to the 'real' ending, namely that despite Jakob's message of hope, all the Jews are transported to concentration camps, which very few survive, the narrator admits he has invented his own ending over the years, which he finds 'unvergleichlich gelungener'. The narrator finds the 'real' ending 'blaßwangig', 'verdrießlich' and 'einfallslos'. (JL: 308) 'Ich habe mir gesagt,

eigentlich jammerschade um eine so schöne Geschichte, daß sie so armselig im Sande verläuft, erfinde ihr ein Ende, mit dem man halbwegs zufrieden sein kann, [...] ein ordentliches Ende läßt manche Schwäche vergessen.' (JL: 292) In the narrator's alternative ending, Jakob is killed trying to escape from the ghetto (the reasons for his flight left unspecified) while seconds after his death the thunder of Russian artillery can be heard in the distance, bearing down on the ghetto to liberate the Jews. Chloe Paver correctly claims that this dual ending represents 'a need to find strategies for coping with the emotional trauma of the Holocaust'. (Paver 1999: 126)

In 1967, at the time he tells the story, the narrator is struck by the lack of resistance in the ghetto. 'Ich habe mich nicht von der Stelle gerührt, ich habe mir die Verordnung eingeprägt, mich strikt an sie gehalten und nur von Zeit zu Zeit den armen Jakob gefragt, was an Neuigkeiten gegangen wäre. Wahrscheinlich werde ich nie damit fertig.' (JL: 112) Hence in telling his story the narrator is finding a way to come to terms with this. The narrator sees an element of hope in Jakob, who was prepared to risk his life to save others: 'ich will erzählen, daß er ein Held war'. (JL: 49) By passing on this story the narrator feels that he in some way compensates for his own inertia during the war. It is for the same reasons that he invents a fictional ending, as it is somewhat easier to bear than the actual outcome of events. David Rock (2000a: 42) offers a similar analysis of the double ending here and suggests that 'the narrator is the direct counterpart to Jakob [...], for like Jakob, who gives hope to the entire ghetto with his fictitious news about the advance of the Russians, the narrator also brings hope with his story about Jakob and with his alternative ending'.

Although the narrator constantly interrupts his fictional ending in order to remind the reader that this chain of events never actually happened, it is possible he could have chosen to give the story this ending in place of the real one: 'Und jetzt stehe ich da mit den zwei Enden und weiß nicht, welches ich erzählen soll, meins oder das häßliche. Bis mir einfällt, alle beide loszuwerden, nicht etwa aus fehlender Entscheidungsfreudigkeit, sondern ich denke nur, daß wir auf diese Art beide zu unserem Recht kommen.' (JL: 292-3) As such the narrative is not primarily concerned with questions of truth. Indeed, Carmel Finnan has shown that many autobiographies of first generation survivors written decades after the Shoah display a similar tendency, for example Klüger's *weiter leben. Eine Jugend* and Cordelia Edvardson's *Gebranntes Kind sucht das Feuer* (1984). 'These mature recollections by child survivors are motivated by the need to come to terms with the

personal consequences of living with the trauma, and are, therefore, more interpretive in nature.' (Finnan 2000: 450)

This concept is supported by the narrator's preference for referring to the endings simply as 'meins' and 'das häßliche', which is far less distinct than 'fictional' and 'real'. The language he uses to describe the false ending and his need to create it again conveys a sense of coming to terms with the story. In creating this false ending and in narrating the story as a whole, the narrator is attempting to recreate his personal history and construct a happier past for himself. Hence the dual ending (and indeed the narrative style of the novel with its several short stories and *Pointen*) represents Becker's own motivation for writing the novel. In her excellent study, *Holocaust Fiction*, Sue Vice (2000: 3) writes: 'In historical and human terms, [the Holocaust] is an irreparable tragedy; in fictional terms, it entails the loss of such novelistic staples as suspense, choosing one's ending, constructing characters with the power to alter their fate, allowing good to triumph over evil.' Becker and his narrator are forced to acknowledge that their personal losses are irretrievable and beyond their control. Instead, with their shared love of storytelling, they seek to achieve something which is in their powers, namely to give back to literature that which the Holocaust has taken from it.

1.3 Der Boxer

1.3.1 How Aron became a German

Becker published his third novel, *Der Boxer,* in 1976, just a few years after the death of his father. Set in the GDR during the mid-seventies, the novel is narrated by a reporter who, for reasons left unspecified, has spent the last two years interviewing a Holocaust survivor, Aron Blank. Over the course of their conversations Aron tells the interviewer about his life directly after the war, about finding his son, Mark, who had spent the war in a different camp to Aron and about the father-son relationship after the two are reunited. *Der Boxer* contains many autobiographical parallels between Mark and Becker and in a 1990 interview he explained that this novel had much to do with his father, their relationship and their inability to discuss the past. Further, Becker admitted that many conversations he had had with his father were to be found in the text of this novel and that in writing *Der Boxer* he hoped to be able to repair this relationship in some way:

> Als mein Vater gestorben war, wußte ich natürlich all die Fragen, die ich ihm nie gestellt hatte, und für die es zu spät war, und ich habe mir mehr Gedanken über dieses Verhältnis gemacht, als je zuvor. Und ein Ausdruck dieses Sachverhalts kann auch dieses Buch sein: Im Nachhinein ein Verhältnis zu reparieren, nachdem es nicht mehr geht; auf theoretische Weise quasi. (Graf & Konietzny 1991: 61)

Aron Blank, who bears many similarities to Max Becker, was born into a family 'der Frömmigkeit ein belächeltes Phänomen war' (DB: 28) in Riga, 1900. He moved to Leipzig with his family in early childhood and then on to Berlin, spending the war imprisoned in a concentration camp. At the end of the war, during which Aron lost his wife and his two oldest children, he chooses to return to Berlin and, due to his status as an *Opfer des Faschismus*, is allocated a luxurious flat which had previously belonged to a Nazi. One of Aron's first tasks on his return is to acquire an *Ausweis*, for which he must first complete an application form: 'erst nach langem Zögern entschloß sich Aron, seinen wirklichen Familiennamen einzutragen. [...] Blank war kein besonderes Kennzeichen. Anders verhielt es sich mit dem Vornamen, der war verräterisch, geschwätzig, der Name Aron war ganz und gar untauglich für Arons Bestrebungen, eine Vergangenheit loszuwerden.' (DB: 18) On the form Aron enters the name 'Arno', the minute change in spelling creating a shift from the typically Jewish Aron to something very Germanic. Aron also dyes his hair in an attempt to look younger, changes his place of birth from Riga to Leipzig and enters a date of birth six years later than his true one to 'erase' the time he spent imprisoned.[18] For Anna Chiarloni, this forgery is to be seen as a survival tactic on the part of Aron: 'Um psychisch überleben zu können, ist Aron entschlossen, die faschistische Vergangenheit aus seinem Gedächtnis zu löschen.' (Chiarloni 1997: 137) While concurring with Chiarloni here, Thomas Jung argues further that Aron's desire to rid himself of this past is linked also to a desire to not awaken feelings of resentment amongst Germans, as Aron fears, 'daß die Rückkehr eines Juden aus dem Lager bei den Deutschen Verlegenheit und Ressentiments auslösen würde'. (Jung 1998: 149)

However, while it is true that Aron carries in post-war Germany the social identity of *Opfer des Faschismus* and that through this identity as victim he signifies Germans as perpetrators by contrast, I disagree with Jung here. Jung argues: 'Aron nutzt in der Öffentlichkeit jede Gelegenheit, auf seinen Status als "Opfer des Faschismus" zu verweisen'. (Jung 1998: 150) Yet Aron does not accept this identity of victim as willingly

[18] Max Becker also died his hair and falsified his date and place of birth after the war.

as Jung suggests. When obtaining his *Ausweis* with the falsified information, Aron pretends all his papers were destroyed in the camp to account for the fact he cannot prove any of the details he wrote on the form. While he is prepared to use his victim status to his own advantage, Aron is repulsed by the reaction this provokes: 'dieses *penetrante* Mitleid in den Augen, eine Art von Anteilnahme, die Aron schon von allem Anfang an zuwider war. Jetzt ertrug er sie aus praktischen Gründen.' (DB: 22) The narrator's use of italics here suggests he is quoting Aron directly.

1.3.2 Ist es auf die Dauer ein erträglicher Zustand, Opfer des Faschismus und nichts anderes zu sein?

It is precisely Aron's feeling of difference from his surroundings which leads him to his crisis of identity and ultimately into isolation. After his experiences during the war Aron is, understandably, filled with feelings of hatred and revenge towards all Germans. When he goes to visit Mark, who is recovering in a hospital in the grounds of a former concentration camp, Aron decides to sleep in a forest rather than seek accommodation in a neighbouring village. '[Aron] sagte sich, in einem Dorf, das so dicht an einem ehemaligen Konzentrationslager liegt, müsse es von *unausstehlichen* Menschen wimmeln.' (DB: 59) When Mark goes to school and is beaten up by one of his classmates, Aron immediately recognises a *'Pogrom im kleinen'* (DB: 218) and even considers attacking the seven-year-old perpetrator himself as an act of revenge. Similarly, when Aron enters a pub filled with German customers, his unexpected appearance causes the room to fall silent. 'Es würde lange dauern, bis man sie gezwungen hatte, sich daran zu gewöhnen, daß einer, der so aussah wie er, so unverwechselbar ähnlich dem Bild des Mannes auf dem Steckbrief, frei herumlaufen und dreiste Blicke werfen durfte, daß er nicht entflohen war, sondern befreit.' (DB: 15) The term 'gezwungen' here suggests Aron neither wants nor expects to be accepted by this society.

This detachment is further reflected in the way that Aron fails to engage on any political or social level in the GDR, something which is highlighted by his disinterest in the Workers' Uprising of June 1953. After his initial terror that the unrest on the streets could have potentially dangerous implications for him and his family, Aron is reassured by the appearance of Soviet tanks. Nevertheless, he insists that the family travel to the coast for the rest of the summer where he feels they will be safer. Although, with the benefit of

hindsight, the reader may see this as an overreaction on Aron's part, it should not be forgotten that 1953 was also the year that saw the highest level of anti-Semitic campaigns in the GDR's history. Aron's flight from East Berlin, where he perceives the two-kilometer journey from the flat to the train station 'wie ein gefährlicher Vorstoß in Feindesland' (DB: 256), is an uneasy echo of the flight of hundreds of the GDR's Jewish citizens in the months preceding the Uprising. While it is undoubtedly true that Aron's experiences have led him 'überall nur Peiniger zu sehen' (DB: 107), his fear here is at least partly justified. Hence this episode of the novel would seem to undermine Becker's claim in 1978 that he had never experienced any anti-Semitism in the GDR. (Zipser 1978: 408)

For Aron nothing has changed. He continues to see all Germans as other, as a threat to his existence and thus perceives himself, and is perceived to be, a victim of fascism within society. In an attempt to break away from this social identity, Aron tries to construct a new, German identity for himself in the form of the Leipzig-born Arno Blank. This desire to not stand out is so severe that when his lack of documentation arouses suspicion during his *Ausweis* application, Aron is pleased, 'daß *einer mit dem Gesicht* für jemand gehalten werden konnte, der seine Vergangenheit verbergen wollte'. (DB: 21) But when Aron manages to convince others of his German identity, he is repulsed. The first time he hears his new name (during an intimate moment with Paula) he is appalled: 'Zuerst dachte ich, sie meinte einen anderen. [...] Heute nennen mich alle so, [...] aber nie wieder ist mir dieser Name so häßlich und unpassend vorgekommen wie damals.' (DB: 47) This German identity is not naturally formed or shaped by the social discourse that surrounds him, and he feels forced to reject all Jewish links in order to maintain a pretence of Germanness. The fact that today everyone knows him as 'Arno' suggests that he is forced to live within this insincerely constructed identity that he himself finds repellent.

Aron tries to support this new identity with a rejection of anything relating to his former, Jewish existence. When collecting his monthly allowance from the state (a further sign of his special status), Aron meets an old acquaintance purely by chance, a Jew called Kenik who survived the same camp as Aron. Kenik expresses surprise not to have seen Aron earlier and gives him the address of a pub, the *Hessische Weinstuben*, where he meets with others: 'Unsere Leute. Die übriggeblieben sind.' (DB: 85) Yet Aron does not want to identify himself with this group, to build a friendship with them: '*was ist das schon für eine Beziehung?*' (DB: 86) At the request of Paula, his lover, Aron does eventually visit the pub and begins working as a bookkeeper for a black marketeer named Tennenbaum.

Yet Aron works in isolation, rejects Kenik's repeated and genuine attempts at friendship, and when he leaves the business Aron thinks long and hard about how to tender his resignation. 'Die einzige *Rache* konnte nur darin bestehen, daß man Tennenbaum das Gefühl gab, ihm gehe ein unersetzlicher Mitarbeiter verloren' (DB: 196), although Tennenbaum always treated Aron with generosity and respect.

In this rejection of his Jewish identity, Aron adopts an almost racist stance towards those who frequent the *Hessische Weinstuben.* Before he is coerced into visiting the *Weinstube* by Paula, Aron is scornful of what he will find there: 'Aron stellte sich vor, daß sie dort eine Art neues Ghetto einrichteten, ohne äußeren Zwang, daran wollte er nicht beteiligt sein.' (DB: 86) And later his description to the narrator of his experience in the pub is hardly any less intolerant: 'sie nannten die Lager, in denen sie selbst den Krieg verbracht hatten, und wollte von ihm das Gleiche wissen, als wären damit alle wichtigen, die Vergangenheit betreffenden Angaben gemacht'. (DB: 88) Through his stance here 'Aron stigmatisiert und ghettoisiert sich selber: als (jüdischer) Außenseiter'. (Jung 1998: 151) At this point we are reminded that we are reading a written account of a third party's spoken narrative and with Aron's description here Becker gently satirises the stereotypical image of the Jew, something upon which the narrator remarks: '"Wenn mir ein anderer als du von den Hessischen Weinstuben erzählt hätte, dann hätte ich ihn für einen Antisemiten gehalten."' (DB: 92) This is reminiscent of the way in which Becker challenges the notion of the Jew in *Jakob der Lügner.* Aron, who is able to Germanise himself simply by changing two letters of his name around, and whose views fluctuate between atheism and anti-Semitism, is juxtaposed with Kenik, who eventually carries out his dream of returning to Palestine. Like the Jews in Jakob's ghetto, the Jews here in the *Weinstube* are not united by any common discourse or ideology, rather they group together 'ohne äußeren Zwang' because their social identities denote them to be the same, victims of fascism whose mere presence arouses feelings of guilt in mainstream society.

Paul O'Doherty (1997: 203) compares *Der Boxer* to Günter Kunert's *Im Namen der Hüte*, published in the same year, and argues both novels carry the same message. 'Those who wished to become part of the "we" [successfully integrated into GDR society] had either to be non-Jewish or to forget their Jewishness.' While Kunert's protagonist, Henry, who only discovers his Jewish extraction after the war, is able to achieve this, Aron is most certainly not. Frank Schenke (2000: 320) shows that this sense of 'Heimatlosigkeit'

from which Aron suffers is shared by many survivors of his generation in GDR literature.[19] It is perpetuated both by their own behaviour and by the discourse that surrounds them: 'Sie leben anscheinend [...] in einer Umgebung, in der sie nur als Opfer des Faschismus wahrgenommen werden.' (Schenke 2000: 323) Despite his efforts, Aron is unable to reject this identity. Nor is he able to answer the narrator's question: 'Ist es auf die Dauer ein erträglicher Zustand, Opfer des Faschismus und nichts anderes zu sein?' (DB: 249)

Jakob was an emphatic attempt on the part of Becker to subvert the German view of Jewishness as other, to eradicate the differences he felt marked him as an outsider in the GDR, and indeed earlier in the chapter I argued that Becker seemed to have succeeded in this to an extent. Here, however, there seems to be more of an acceptance of this position as an outsider, the rejection of the unwanted social identities is less resolute and less successful than was the case in *Jakob*. For Paul O'Doherty (1997: 198), the novel 'is in many ways an attempt at *Gegenwarts-bewältigung*, an attempt to discover what, if any, role could be played in the GDR by those victims of Nazism who were not committed communists, who were not part of some greater whole'. This question is essentially left open-ended and is perhaps most keenly represented in the relationship between Aron and the narrator. This is the only place in the novel where real dialogue exists between a Jew and a German, where the barriers created by social discourse are temporarily overcome. By the very nature of his profession the narrator has both the means and the intention of bringing into the (German) public domain for debate a subject that had remained strictly taboo within Becker's relationships with his father and society. As the narrator's professional task is finished, it remains to be seen if a personal relationship can exist between the two. 'Alles was jetzt kommt, will er mich spüren lassen, ist eine neue Geschichte, die alte ist vorbei. Entweder unsere Bekanntschaft beginnt jetzt, oder sie hat nie existiert, das Bisherige war eine Art Gegenleistung, höchstens ein Anknüpfungspunkt.' (DB: 304)

1.3.3 Mark Berger or Mark Blank?

Aron's wife and two oldest children were killed during the war but he was unsure of the fate of his third child, Mark, who had been separated from Aron and moved to a separate

[19] Other examples Schenke cites include Arno Bronstein in *Bronsteins Kinder* and the narrator's father in Peter Edel's *Die Bilder des Zeugen Schattmann* (1969).

children's camp. With the help of Joint, the American aid organisation whose tasks included reuniting Displaced Persons with their families, Aron discovers Mark is alive and recovering from the camp in a Bavarian hospital. Yet doubts are immediately raised about Mark's true identity, as he was entered on the camp's lists not as Mark Blank, but as Mark Berger. He is, however, the only Mark on the lists. The biographical parallels here with Becker's own life are apparent immediately: a young boy separated from his family, all of whom, with the exception of his father, are killed. After the war the son is reunited with the father and they move to start a new life in Berlin. There are, however, two important differences between Mark and the young Becker, namely that there was never any doubt about Becker's parentage and that while Mark speaks German, Becker spoke only the few words he had learned from the camp guards. The scene of Mark and Aron's first conversation demonstrates the strangeness between father and son in the beginning:

"Ich bin dein Vater."

Endlich keine Frage mehr, endlich eine Information, Mark nahm sie gelassen zur Kenntnis. Sein Gesicht verriet weder Freude noch Bewegung.

"Weißt du, wie dein Vater geheißen hat?"

"Nein."

"Wenn ich dein Vater bin, dann bist du mein...?"

Zum erstenmal mißachtete Mark die Regeln eines Verhörs, er antwortete nicht, sondern zuckte mit den Schultern. Unter dem weißen Hemd, sagt Aron, das bis dahin leer auf dem Bett zu liegen schien, bewegten sich die Schultern auf und ab.

"Dann bist du mein Sohn," sagte Aron. "Verstehst du?"

"Nein."

Für Minuten war es Aron unbegreiflich, was Mark daran nicht verstehen mochte, die Direktorin hatte mit keinem Wort erwähnt, daß er auch *meschugge* war. Er sagte: "Was verstehst du nicht?"

"Dieses Wort."

Welches Wort?"

"Was Sie gesagt haben."

"Sohn?"

"Ja."

"Das ist ganz leicht", sagte Aron. "Ich bin dein Vater, und du bist mein Sohn. Das sind einfach die Worte dafür. Verstehst du jetzt?"

"Ja."

"Dann sag es noch einmal."

"Sie sind mein Vater", sagte Mark, "und ich bin Ihr Sohn."

"Richtig. Aber du mußt nicht Sie zu mir sagen, sondern du. Sag noch einmal: Du bist mein Vater."

"Du bist mein Vater."

"Ich bin dein Sohn."

"Du bist mein Sohn."

"Nein, das ist falsch", sagte Aron.

Plötzlich begann Mark zu weinen. (DB: 64-5)

Chaim Shoham claims this initial conversation between Mark and Aron could be either 'eine Wiederaufnahme der verlorenen Identität oder das Erhalten einer neuen' for Mark. In other words Mark reassumes his rightful identity of Blank, or he abandons the identity of Berger for that of Blank. (Shoham 1986: 231) What is clear from this scene is the process by which Mark assumes the new identity of 'Sohn' as he learns new language and vocabulary, in a similar manner to Becker's own acquisition of the German language. Simultaneously, as he teaches Mark these new concepts, Aron convinces himself that Mark is his son, 'an eine andere Möglichkeit wollte Aron nicht denken'. (DB: 66) From this point on Aron decides 'er wollte niemals wieder mit Mark über das Lager sprechen' (DB: 69) and the father-son relationship becomes characterised by silence. Again the autobiographical parallels are obvious if we compare this to Becker's 1977 Essay 'Mein Judentum' where he stated: 'Mein Vater vermied es von Anfang an und sehr konsequent, das Gespräch mit mir auf die Vergangenheit zu bringen.' (EG: 12)

From an early age, then, Mark's identity is largely imposed upon him, the parts of his past to which he has access and knowledge are selected for him by his father. Aron confesses 'er habe immer nur darüber nachgedacht, wie Mark sein müßte, um seinen, Arons, Wünschen zu entsprechen, sich aber nie die umgekehrte Frage gestellt. (DB: 278) Aron does admit to having made mistakes in Mark's upbringing, 'auf keinen Fall aber den [Fehler], einen Juden aus ihm gemacht zu haben'. (DB: 298) The mistakes Aron makes himself in trying to deny his past and construct a false, German identity for himself are passed on to Mark. Brought up within this dichotomy of hating and rejecting Germans and Jews alike, Mark finds assimilation into GDR society impossible and becomes naturally curious about his own background. He exists between what Carmel Finnan in her analysis

of Laura Waco's autobiography refers to as 'double walls', her analysis equally applicable to Mark here: Aron's attitude 'coupled with the dominant climate in Germany in the 1950s produce a childhood reality characterised by a series of barriers erected by both sides.' (Finnan 2000: 454) Mark begins to feel that his father's silence has deprived him of an important part of his identity and as an adult Mark seeks to break down one of these walls by experiencing Jewishness for himself. He flees first to West Germany, then to Israel, where it is assumed he dies fighting in the Six Days' War. David Rock (2000b: 342) shows that 'by choosing a Jewish identity for himself in Israel, Mark negates his father's attempts to suppress his own Jewish identity and also to protect Mark from his own Jewishness. In this respect, Mark corresponds closely to the definition of a Jew given by Becker in his essay "Mein Judentum"', namely that it is an individual and intellectual decision. Yet Aron remains ignorant of the fact that he contributed to Mark's search for his past, 'bis heute hat Aron nicht aufgehört zu wundern, daß sein Sohn nach Israel ging'. (DB: 297)

1.3.4 Ein Verhältnis reparieren, nachdem es nicht mehr geht

So while the figure of Mark may seem initially very similar to Becker, it is not the author's intention to recreate his own history through this character. Mark represents an exploration of one possible path Becker's life could have taken, namely that of choosing to 'become' a Jew. The narrative structure of *Boxer* is reminiscent of that in *Jakob,* a written account by a skilled storyteller of a spoken narrative provided by a third person. Here also, the narrator's occasional use of italics to denote that he is quoting Aron directly could be seen as lending the narrator's story more credibility. However, it is clear that apart from these rare quotes, the rest of the narrative is a subjective account of what the narrator has understood from Aron. At times the narrator admits he becomes frustrated with Aron's reluctance to explain issues he thinks the narrator should automatically understand. 'Es fällt mir schwer wie am ersten Tag, mich damit abzufinden, daß ich immer wieder auf Vermutungen angewiesen sein werde.' (DB: 70) And while the narrator seems to believe his notebooks hold an historically accurate account of Aron's life, Aron himself disputes this: 'es ist nicht meine Geschichte. Im günstigsten Fall ist es etwas, was du für meine Geschichte hältst.' (DB: 10) In *Der Boxer* Becker shows himself to be highly aware of the subjectivity of narrative as a function of memory, and even of the unreliability of memory itself. He does not attempt to define his own Jewishness here, or to reconstruct the forgotten parts of his past as he

admitted had partly been the case with *Jakob*, rather Becker uses his skill as a writer to consciously explore his relationship with his father, to try out through fiction different paths this factual relationship could have taken.

In the narrator, then, Becker constructs a tool for posing the questions Becker never asked his father, the questions Mark never asked Aron. It is significant that Becker creates the reporter here, for while Becker seems secure asking these questions within the literary identity of a reporter, a professional writer, the son is still unable to speak to the father about such issues. Thus Becker takes up the theme of generational conflict faced by victims and survivors of the Holocaust, a theme which had long been prevalent in drama which allows the Germans, or perpetrators, to speak for themselves and invites the audience to pass judgement. Key examples here are Rolf Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter* (1963) and Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* (1965). Irene Heidelberger-Leonard notes that Becker may even be the first author, 'der sich dem Problem aus der Perspektive der Opfer stellt. Becker zeigt, daß selbst für die Opfer die "Gnade der späten Geburt" sich eher zu einem Flucht verkehrt'. (Heidelberger-Leonard 1997: 201) Although Mark is, strictly speaking, a first-generation victim, he was not old enough to comprehend his experiences during the Shoah and finds himself cut off from this past as he grows up. Aron, on the other hand, is able to remember a normal, adult life before the war and is desperate to return to this normality by blocking out the events that disrupted it. However, it is precisely these historical events from which Mark is alienated and which Aron tries to deny that form the backdrop against which Mark and Aron's identities are defined in the context they find themselves, the Shoah has become an integral part of their identities.

As for Becker's attempt to repair this relationship 'nachdem es nicht mehr geht', the outcome seems rather bleak. As the last of many stories Aron tells the narrator of the mourning process he went through after Mark's presumed death. To lessen the pain Aron told himself initially that Mark was never his own son but eventually realised, 'daß er um Mark weinte, unabhängig davon, wer er war'. (DB: 301) This is perhaps an indication that Becker felt he had reconciled some of the tension between himself and his father, yet this reconciliation only occurs after Mark's death in the novel and Becker's father's death in reality. Thus this hint of understanding offers little hope for the resolution of the wider generational problem. The novel is essentially pessimistic, nothing is resolved. The relationship between the generations is not opened up in any way, Mark and Aron learn nothing about each other and their desperate attempts at establishing their identities fail:

Mark dies, once again a victim of war, in Israel searching for the roots which Aron tries to protect him from. As Schenke has shown, this generational conflict becomes a primary concern of Becker's writing as he takes up the question 'inwieweit die Eltern ihre Lebensauffassung weitergeben können, wenn sie ihre Erfahrungen, zu denen die Kindergeneration ohnehin schwer Zugang findet, demonstrativ verschweigen'. (Schenke 2000: 320)

1.4 Nach der ersten Zukunft

1.4.1 Ich hätte mich also, um Jude zu werden, schon selbst bemühen müssen

The few years following the publication of *Der Boxer* represented the culmination of a period of great personal and political upheaval for Becker.[20] It is, then, at first glance, perhaps somewhat surprising that after this difficult period which forced Becker to re-evaluate both his loyalty to his *Heimat* and his political identity, the first book he published was a collection of short stories, in which the longest story by far is 'Die Mauer', with a primarily Jewish thematic content. Moreover, a further twenty pages are given to 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', which is often read as a celebration of the art of storytelling, but which also contains more sinister undertones relating to the Holocaust. So it seems that this period of transition caused Becker to undergo a fundamental reassessment of his identity, including that relating to his Jewish ancestry, especially when we consider that it was also during this time that Becker produced his first essayistic work relating to the theme of Judaism.

Despite the fact that reviewers and literary critics alike had been heralding Becker as a great Jewish author since the publication of *Jakob* almost a decade earlier, it was not until 1977 that Becker replied to these claims in the form of 'Mein Judentum'. Becker opens his essay by calling into question the notion of Jewishness as something one inherits, stating that every time he was asked in the past where he was from he would answer: '"Meine Eltern waren Juden." Wenn der Frager mitunter dann konstatierte: "Sie sind also Jude", berichtigte ich ihn jedesmal, in dem ich noch einmal meine Formel sagte: "Meine Eltern waren Juden." Der Unterschied schien mir irgendwie wichtig zu sein.' (EG: 9) The

[20] See section 3.2.3 for details of this time.

essay goes on to debate Jewishness as a theoretical concept, but as the title suggests, 'Mein Judentum' reads above all as a very subjective account of how Becker saw his own Jewishness. Becker uses this essay primarily not as a tool for exploring different possibilities or different facets of his identity, as is broadly the case with his 'Jewish' fiction, rather here the message would appear to be one of denial, at least initially. While Becker acknowledges the consequences his Jewish ancestry had for his life, not least the fact that by the end of the war his vast family, 'eine ehedem fast unübersehbare Personenschar, wie ich höre, [sich] auf drei Überlebende reduziert [hatte],' he does not accept that this makes him a Jew. (EG: 9) Indeed, he refers to the child he was in the concentration camps as 'derjenige, der ich damals war' (EG: 11), signifying that Becker sees his post-war identity as something separate to his earlier Jewish social identity, or his family's Jewish identity that caused him to be imprisoned in the first place. This sense of distance from his ancestry is emphasised further by the 'wie ich höre', suggesting that this notion of family is something Becker has never experienced directly.

Further to this distinction between his Jewish ancestry and his adult identity, Becker points also to his lack of affinity with the Jewish religion, claiming that he is an atheist. For Becker, choosing to align oneself with a religious group '[bedeutet] einen intellektuellen Entschluß' (EG: 14)[21] and he was angered by others' attempts to define him as a Jew. 'Ich gebe dieses Problem deswegen so viel Raum und werde aufgeregt [...], weil schon so lästig oft über meinen Kopf hinweg entschieden wurde, was und wie ich bin: unter anderem eben Jude.' (EG: 15) Yet despite his aversion to others determining his identity for him, Becker was aware of the importance of the perceptions of others when defining one's identity, his comments here echoing those of Jean Améry we discussed earlier: 'Ich weiß wohl, daß man nicht nur der ist, der zu sein einem vorschwebt, sondern daß man wohl oder übel auch der zu sein hat, für den die anderen einen halten. Das ist ja das Unglück. Und so gesehen bin ich in drei Teufels Namen der, der ich nach dem Urteil vieler gefälligst zu sein habe: Jude.' (EG: 16) Here Becker has come to accept, albeit only grudgingly, the Jewish identity he fought so hard to reject in *Jakob*. In this way, too, Becker unwittingly breaks down his definition of a Jew as someone with a religious or spiritual affinity for Judaism when he defines his father as a Jew, while acknowledging that his father only ever attended the synagogue in order to meet with friends and acquaintances. '[Ich weiß], daß er dort ungeduldig auf das Ende der Gebete gewartet hat,

[21] According to this definition, Mark in *Der Boxer* is a Jew, as was discussed in 1.3.3.

um sich ungestört mit den von ihm ausgesuchten Leuten unterhalten zu können.' (EG: 13) From this one can deduce that although Becker's father claimed no affinity to Judaism, he was still defined as a Jew by others, not least by his own son.

From early childhood, 'als einziger Achtjähriger, [der] weit und breit nicht *richtig* sprechen konnte' (EG: 12), Becker was acutely aware of the role played by difference in identity construction and he sought to overcome this as quickly as possible by mastering the German language. Similarly, Becker's father felt also that his own Jewish identity was largely imposed upon him from the outside as a function of difference. Becker writes: 'Einmal hat [mein Vater] mir gesagt: "Wenn es keinen Antisemitismus geben würde – denkst du, ich hätte mich auch nur eine Sekunde als Jude gefühlt?"' (EG: 12) This comment by Becker's father is echoed by Georg's father in Rudolf Hirsch's *Patria Israel* (1983). Paul O'Doherty shows how in a 'classic example of Sartre's axiom that the anti-Semite makes the Jew, the narrator tells us that Georg's father "wäre längst aus der jüdischen Gemeinde ausgeschieden, gäbe es nicht so viele Judenfeinde. Sein Austritt hätte dann wie Feigheit ausgesehen."' (O'Doherty 1997: 230) The people Becker's father met at the synagogue were not friends from before the war, rather they were people who had also been imprisoned in concentration camps 'und mit denen daher ein gewissermaßen natürlicher Konsensus vorhanden war'. (EG: 13) As with the *Weinstube* guests in *Der Boxer*, this affinity only existed as a result of their shared suffering at the hands of anti-Semites.

For Thomas Jung, 'Mein Judentum' reads as a total denial on Becker's part of his Jewish identity, and Jung argues further that Becker did not accept until 1990 that his Jewish ancestry was of any significance to him. However, Jung is mistaken when he claims that by the time 'Mein Judentum' was written Becker was living in the West where he had been confronted 'mit antijüdischen Beschimpfungen'. (Jung 1998: 13) This essay was, in fact, originally given as a lecture as part of a series by the *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* in the summer of 1977 when Becker still lived in the GDR. Consequently, the feeling of having a Jewish social identity imposed upon him must have been something Becker experienced in the GDR, not only in the West. Becker does continue to deny his Jewishness, especially to critics who would label him a Jew, as he points to his lack of connection to Jewish/family traditions: 'Überhaupt, vermute ich, bedeuten mir Traditionen wenig', as well as to his atheist convictions to support his case: 'Ich hätte mich also, um Jude zu werden, schon selbst bemühen müssen.' (EG: 20) However, contrary to Jung's

claims, there are indications in the essay that Becker goes some way to accepting his Jewishness, even if he is unwilling to admit it.

Jung supports his argument by referring to Becker's opening comment that having Jewish parents does not necessarily make him a Jew. Yet these comments are all made in the past tense. '"Meine Eltern waren Juden." Ich benutzte diesen Satz wie einen feststehenden Formel [...]. Der Unterschied schien mir irgendwie wichtig zu sein.' (EG: 9) This standard answer about his history was something Becker had stopped using already by the time he wrote 'Mein Judentum'. Now Becker begrudgingly begins to accept the concept of a social identity and is even guilty of imposing the identity of Jew on his father, despite the latter's self-proclaimed lack of religious conviction. Finally, Becker concludes his essay on a note of uncertainty:

> Ich stelle mir vor, ich irrte mich in einer so wichtigen Frage, [...] ich fühle mich nicht als Jude, bin aber in hunderterlei Beziehung einer. Na und? Wozu, frage ich mich, muß ich einem solchen Rätsel unbedingt auf den Grund kommen wollen? Wäre ich hinterher klüger? Ich fürchte: nein. Ich fürchte: ich würde nur vergeblich versuchen, ein Geheimnis aufzuklären, ohne das mein Leben ärmer wäre. (EG: 21)

This conclusion deliberately underplays the importance of Becker's Jewishness and the questions pertaining to it, such as those relating to his family and ancestry, the significance of which Becker initially dismisses. However, he then admits these issues present a 'Rätsel', or 'Geheimnis' for him, and even confesses he needs this uncertainty, which forms a large part of his identity in itself. So this conclusion undermines the earlier sections of the essay denying Becker's Jewish identity; a careful reader of Becker will hardly be taken in by the casual 'Überhaupt, vermute ich, bedeuten mir Traditionen wenig'. (EG: 20) Moreover, Becker's apparent trivialisation of these questions is belied by the frequency and regularity with which he returns to the Jewish thematic in his work. If this argument is valid, then it follows that Becker's denial of the importance of his Jewishness is subverted by the very existence of the text which delivers it.

1.4.2 Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte

'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte' is a story about the art of storytelling itself. The first-person narrator retells a story he had heard many times over from his late father about a tradition that had grown out of family gatherings, such events normally taking place to

mark the birth of a new child into the family. At these gatherings Uncle Gideon would be called upon to regale the family members with the tale of a fateful business trip he made to London. Gideon completes all his business early 'wie es sich fast von selbst versteht – schick Onkel Gideon etwas kaufen, und er kommt mit mehr Geld zurück, als du ihm mitgegeben hast'. (NZ: 45) He decides to enjoy the rest of his stay in London as a short holiday and is delighted to accept an invitation to a fancy dress party in the place of a business acquaintance who is unable to attend. After much thought Gideon finally decides to go dressed as a clown and spends the better part of a day perfecting his costume, only to arrive at the party and discover not only that he is the sole person in fancy dress, but that he is also the only guest. The business acquaintance has played a cruel, if somewhat unfathomable trick on Gideon. The choice of a clown costume above all others is also no accident, as Jürgen Egyptien (1997: 284-5) shows. With his pointy hat, 'der über seinen Status als Requisit des Clownkostüms hinaus die vorgeschriebene Kopfbedeckung der Juden im mittelalterlichen Europa zitiert' and long coat worn to cover his outfit 'macht [Gideon] sich wiederum den Kaftan tragenden Ostjuden ähnlich'.[22]

It is not so much the story itself, rather the way in which it is told by Gideon and received by the enraptured audience that is the main content of the story. Before Gideon begins the tale, he must first be coaxed and coerced into it by members of the family/audience, who then urge Gideon on with their laughter, tears, gasps and shrieks as he slowly unravels the story, timing his narrative perfectly to create the maximum amount of tension and thus pleasure for his listeners, who have, in any case, heard this story innumerable times already. As the narrator comments: 'Ich finde [die Geschichte] nicht schlecht, so bedeutend aber auch nicht. Ihr großer Erfolg muß mit Onkel Gideons Ausstrahlung zu tun gehabt haben.' (NZ: 42) The narrator has been told this story at least a dozen times by his father, but never witnessed it himself, apart from at the family gathering arranged to celebrate his own birth. 'Es ärgert mich schon sehr, daß die Gewohnheit, von der die Rede sein wird, vor meiner Zeit entstand und vor meiner Zeit verging.' (NZ: 40) Only once in the story is Gideon's fate and thus the fate of the story mentioned. 'Einmal sagte mein Vater: Gideon war schon ein sehr alter Mann, als sie ihn nach Maidanek brachten, aber trotzdem.' (NZ: 42) This mildly indignant understatement is something of a trademark of Becker's and serves to locate the story historically, as well as offering an explanation as to why this much loved tradition no longer exists.

[22] Thomas Jung (1998: 230) offers a similar analysis of Becker's choice of costume for Gideon.

Critics have almost unanimously focused on the narrative structure of the story as an example of (eastern European) Jewish family tradition, namely that of oral storytelling.[23] The father attempts to preserve the tradition of the story and the act of telling it as he relates the story 'zehn- oder zwanzigmal' to his son. However, because the narrator/son does not share this urge to retell the story several times, 'ich [schreibe] sie mir jetzt vom Hals'. (NZ: 42) Jung (1998: 299) notes here how in his desire to rid himself of the story the narrator 'erinnert damit gleichsam an die Motivation des Ich-Erzählers im Jakob-Roman'. Yet before he can write the story down, the narrator has one final problem to overcome. 'Die Geschichte hat nämlich viele verschiedene Versionen. Bei jeder Erzählung meines Vaters klang sie anders [...]. Leider taucht mir erst jetzt, und viel zu spät, die Frage auf, ob nicht vielleicht schon Onkel Gideon Urheber der verschiedenen Versionen gewesen ist.' (NZ: 43) The narrator decides to write a version of the story that encompasses as many elements of the different versions as possible. Rock (2000a: 77) points here to the contradictory outcome of the narrator writing the story down, 'thereby giving it a final and enduring shape and so also paradoxically marking both the end of this oral tradition and its perpetuation, since the story will now not be told, but read again and again'.

1.4.3 Überhaupt, vermute ich, bedeuten mir Traditionen wenig

Contrary to such interpretations, I argue that it is not the act of writing down the story that first calls an end to the oral tradition, rather I concur with the narrator: 'Erst ein so Starker wie der Tod hat es fertiggebracht, die Sache aufzuhalten.' (NZ: 42) The Holocaust and the destruction of the family meant simultaneously the destruction of the stage on which the story was told (and as the only survivors we learn of are the narrator and his father, who has recently died, there seems to be little chance of new births into the family to revive the traditional gatherings, and indeed little chance of finding enough surviving family members to constitute a gathering). Through the narrator here, Becker expresses his regret at having missed the opportunity to become part of this family tradition, the storytelling is only a small part of this and represents the real tradition, namely the family gatherings at which a new birth into the family is celebrated. For Becker and the narrator, and thus

[23] See Jürgen Egyptien in Heidelberger-Leonard (1997: 279-86) for a fuller analysis of this argument. David Rock (2000b: 341) and Thomas Jung (1998: 227) also explore this element of the story.

implicitly for all second-generation German Jews, this tradition and sense of family are things they will never experience and which are alien to them. A close analysis of 'Mein Judentum' and 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte' reveals many parallels between the two. In the former, Becker describes his family before the war as a 'fast unübersehbare Personenschar, wie ich höre'. (EG: 9) When the narrator sets the scene in the latter for the great event of the storytelling he talks of the extended family. 'Damals war die Familie noch weitverzweigt – ich habe das Wort *unübersehbar* im Ohr.' (NZ:40) And later: 'Familiensinn ist, laut meinem Vater, nicht nur eine Theorie.' (NZ: 41) In both cases the implication is clearly that the concept of 'family' is something the author and narrator have only heard about from their fathers. The sense of alienation from these roots is further shown by the narrator's reluctance to exchange roles with his father in 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', when the father expresses the desire to hear, rather than tell the story. 'Ich habe lange überlegt, ob ich ihm nicht den Vorschlag machen sollte, unsere Rollen zu tauschen. Ich habe darauf verzichtet, weil es mir irgendwie ungehörig zu sein schien.' (NZ: 57) The narrator feels too distanced from this tradition to take a more active role, something that would almost seem like an imposition on his part. This sentiment is echoed by the father, who stubbornly carries out his sense of duty in trying to keep the story alive, but whose nostalgic desire to return to part of the audience of the past suggests also that he finds this story lost in the now diminished family.

So Becker's casual claim in 'Mein Judentum' - 'Überhaupt, vermute ich, bedeuten mir Traditionen wenig' (EG: 20) - is somewhat undermined here by this clear preoccupation with (Jewish) family tradition. The tradition in question is not so much the story described, but the ritual, regular coming together of the family and the sense of family and community these gatherings afford the members, something for which the narrator yearns. As he is drawn into the sense of familiarity between the members of the audience in the story, with the anticipation that each listener knows how the others will react to certain parts of the story, the narrator admits, almost despite himself, 'daß Onkel Gideons Geschichte auch mir von Mal zu Mal besser gefiel'. (NZ: 43) And here we see the real paradox. While the narrator wishes to become a part of this tradition, the family members are not real people for him, they are simply characters in a story and as such strange and distant. The narrator can only exist outside of, not as a part of this story. This sense of alienation combined with the absence of a forum, ie. a family gathering, in which to tell the story, causes the narrator to reject the smaller tradition of oral storytelling, and

thus the wider family whose demise he laments, as he finally writes this fluid, fluctuating story down in a solid form.

1.4.4 Die Mauer

The longest story in this volume, 'Die Mauer', is set in a ghetto during the war and narrated in the first person by a child who is the same age as Becker was during his time in the ghetto. Indeed, in 1991 Becker explained to David Rock (2000a: 78) that the story was actually based on 'the very few, extremely hazy memories of his own childhood in Łodz'. The narrator, now an adult, opens the story in a manner which suggests he has suddenly and unexpectedly slipped into memory, almost as though he has become a child again. 'Mein Gott, ich bin fünf Jahre alt, wir Juden sind wieder ein stilles Glück.' (NZ: 62) From this point on the narrative is taken over by the boy, with occasional interruptions from the adult narrator reminding the reader 'of the historical dimensions of the story' (Rock 2000a: 81) and echoing the 'mündliche Erzählform' (Jung 1998: 230) of 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte'.

The story contains several autobiographical elements. Like his author, the narrator remembers only his mother's voice, not her appearance, suggesting that the mother in the story does not survive the war. Also the child-narrator learns his first German words from the guards in the ghetto in the same way Becker did. However, I concur with Jung's analysis here that the story is not autobiographical, rather it is clearly fictionalised and not to be read as historical truth. As with 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte' we are reminded frequently that the story we are reading is largely a product of dubious, subjective memories, and not historical fact. The narrator tells us that at least part of his story is 'true', suggesting he may have conducted his own research after the war in the same way that the narrator of *Jakob der Lügner* did. 'Ein kleiner Teil des Gettos [sic] – und das hat mit Erinnerung nichts zu tun, es ist die Wahrheit – ein kleiner Teil des Ghettos ist wie ein Lager.' (NZ: 67-8) However, in this way the narrator only highlights the fact that the majority of his story is based on memory, rather than fact. This deliberate fictionalisation creates an ambiguous setting for the story and thus it could have taken place in every or none of the real ghettos. Furthermore, as the narrator experiences the ghetto as a child, he is unable to comprehend much of what happens around him and to him, making him an unreliable witness in any event. David Rock (2000a: 80) has pointed to the fairy-tale

imagery prevalent throughout the story to highlight this unreliability. To the narrator, the very real threats of the ghetto are less dangerous than the imaginary threats in his 'world of childhood', where he is almost boiled alive (NZ: 71), chased by ghosts (NZ: 78) and then captured by a giant in the shape of a German soldier. (NZ: 80) Consequently it can be argued that through this childish narrative, like his author, the narrator is trying to unlock the mystery of his past, in this instance as a part of 'wir Juden', a group which no longer exists and with which he can thus no longer identify himself. As David Rock (2000a: 80) shows: 'The retrieval of his own possible memories and of the forgotten past through words, through language, through writing, is the central though understated theme of "Die Mauer".'

In the story the narrator tells how his family, along with every household on their side of the street, is moved from the main ghetto into a holding camp, from which they will then presumably be sent to a concentration camp. In this holding camp the narrator meets one of his friends from his street. Both children were made to leave their favourite toys and belongings behind due to space restrictions when they were moved and together they make a plan to leave the camp in the dead of night to return to their homes and recover their treasured possessions. One of the boys has discovered a row of metal stakes protruding from the wall which are strong enough to function as a ladder, and despite their fear, the boys manage to evade the watchful eyes of their parents, leave the barracks and escape the camp in the night. However, when they return to the camp, triumphantly carrying their booty (a torch and some binoculars) yet bruised and scared from the night's adventures, they discover that there is no equivalent ladder on the outside of the wall and that they are thus trapped on the wrong side. Eventually they are discovered by a German soldier, who decides against taking them to his superiors, and helps them over the wall.

The terrible irony that the boys face the most trouble getting back into the camp after a relatively easy escape is matched only by the fact that it is a German soldier who (temporarily) saves their lives. In addition to providing a platform for Becker's trademark irony, the action of the German soldier also serves to breakdown his stereotype in a manner reminiscent of the way Becker challenges prejudices and stereotypical identities in *Jakob* and *Boxer*, albeit here in a much milder form. For Jung (1998: 234) this soldier is not committing an act of bravery or kindness when he helps the children back into the camp, rather '[er] will nicht eigenhändig schuldig werden, weiß er doch, daß die jenseits der Mauer gefangen gehaltenen Juden für den Abtransport ins Vernichtungslager bestimmt

sind'. There is undoubtedly an element of truth in this observation and the soldier can indeed be seen as representative of the system that persecutes the boys. However, the situation is more complex than Jung suggests and his claim that the soldier still sends the boys to their death is undermined to an extent by the fact that the narrator has survived into adulthood to tell his tale. The bravery of the soldier's act is emphasised further by the child's failure to appreciate the great risk the soldier puts himself at, as the boy feels only rage for the soldier who confiscated his torch (presumably aware of the questions this would raise when found by the child's parents): '"Wißt ihr, was mir passiert, wenn ich euch nicht zur Wache bringe?" Als ob das unsere Sache ist, er ist nicht nur ein Dieb, er ist auch ein Idiot.' (NZ: 96) The stereotype of the evil Nazi is countered here by the risk the soldier takes in helping the children, and undermined by the narrator's description of him. In keeping with the fairy-tale imagery the narrator refers to the soldier as 'der Riese' (NZ: 97), as though he feels he has been captured by an evil giant. He further describes his captor to the reader: 'wie alle Deutschen hat er blondes Haar'. (NZ: 97)

Similarly, and in keeping with the themes established in the novels discussed earlier in the chapter, the Jews portrayed in the 'Die Mauer' are not united by any discourse or ideology other than their shared suffering. There is little or no sense of community or empathy between the characters. It is presumably a Jewish spy who reports Tenzer, a fellow resident of the narrator's street, to the German police for breaking the regulation stipulating no plants are allowed in the ghetto and the narrator's father comments that there is little difference whether one is caught breaking rules by the Germans or 'die eigene Polizei'. (NZ: 62) As with the Jews in Jakob's ghetto, the narrator's young friends are, as Jung notes, from very diverse backgrounds: 'Itzek (gleich Isaak) kann als der orthodoxe Jude verstanden werden, während Julian offensichtlich aus einem assimiliert jüdischen Elternhaus kommt.' (Jung 1998: 233) By portraying these stereotypes from a simplified, childish perspective ('wie alle Deutschen hat er blondes Haar') Becker challenges the systems of logic that place individuals in groups such as 'Jew' or 'German' and thus undermines both the validity of these groups and the concept of a universal notion of Jewish and German identities.

However, these texts show a clear transition in Becker's attitude towards his Jewish identity. While he still seeks to challenge the German view of the Jew as other, there is clearly less resistance on Becker's part towards his Jewish identity. Indeed, the fact that 'Die Mauer' equally undermines the stereotype of the evil Nazi, suggests that Becker is

reacting more against the GDR literary (and political) discourses of polarised 'good' and 'bad' wartime characters than he is against any imposed social identity. If *Jakob* reads as a vehement denial of Becker's Jewishness, then the texts in question here are far more about wanting to engage with this lost past, something which began to emerge in *Der Boxer* with Mark's emigration to Israel. In 'Mein Judentum' Becker initially concedes only begrudgingly that he has a Jewish identity at all, but then goes on to admit that the secrets of his past form a large part of his identity in themselves and even that his life would be poorer without them. In common with 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', 'Mein Judentum' shows an almost wistful longing for access to this lost past.

While Becker's earlier Jewish works had undoubtedly represented a search for his forgotten memories, they did not express any desire to engage with this early Jewish identity in any way. This is clearly a key focus now of 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte'. Although it shares with Becker's other Jewish works a concern with the plight of the Jew in post-war Germany, the fact that the story is set before the war shows a desire to access this past Jewish identity as it existed in happier times. In her excellent study *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust*, Lynn Rapaport (1997: 24) shows 'how second-generation Jews in Germany draw on Holocaust memory as the ultimate tool for constructing identity and community. [...] It is their ultimate metaphor, a part of their roots, the source from which the meanings they bestow to daily life are constituted'. Here Becker is clearly seeking to construct his identity in this manner. The characters in 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte' conform to stereotypical concepts of Jews: Gideon's formidable business prowess; his choice of costume for the fancy dress party; the tradition of oral storytelling. But now Becker is portraying a positive stereotype representing a Jewish identity that he wants to be part of; he is embracing this tradition. David Rock (2000b: 341) shows that through his reminiscing narrator, 'Becker is able [...] to preserve something of the cheerful humour of traditional Jewish storytelling even in the shadow of the Holocaust'. In my analysis of *Jakob der Lügner* I argued that through the use of humour and a love of storytelling, Becker was attempting to restore to literature that which the Holocaust had taken from it. The sense of loss here is far more personal and Becker goes further than in any of his other writing to attempt to reclaim his past, to engage with and embrace this earlier, positive Jewishness. Ultimately, however, like the narrator in 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', Becker cannot find any route back to this time.

1.5 Bronsteins Kinder

1.5.1 Hans: A Jew who became a German?

Published in 1986, *Bronsteins Kinder* is Becker's third and final novel to deal with a predominantly Jewish subject matter, although much of his essayistic work written in the years before his death continues this thematic. The novel is set very precisely in the summer of 1974. Becker claimed the idea for the story was founded on true events: In 1946 in Berlin a friend of Becker's father saw a guard who had worked in his concentration camp, from which he had only recently been liberated, walking along the street. The man picked up a stone, and beat the guard to death with it. '"Mein Vater hat ihn im Gefängnis besucht und mir davon erzählt. Ich war zehn Jahre alt."' (Hage 1986: 2) Becker found this to be wholly unsurprising; more remarkable for him was the fact that such cases did not occur more often. In the novel the protagonist and *Ich-Erzähler*, nineteen-year-old Hans Bronstein, tells how his father, Arno, who had been a concentration camp prisoner during the war, kidnaps (with the help of two accomplices) a former camp guard and holds him prisoner in his weekend house, which is conveniently situated in a relatively deserted wood. At the end of the novel Arno dies from a heart attack, presumably induced by the extreme stress he was under for the duration of the kidnapping. The novel holds a dual narrative structure, as Hans narrates in parallel both the events of one year earlier which led up to his father's death and also the present events he experiences now at the end of a year of mourning, as he tries to make sense of what has happened.

Becker had been living in the West for almost a decade by the time the novel was published, and in answer to a questionnaire for the *FAZ* in 1980 where he was asked what had disappointed him the most about his stay in the West, Becker said it was the way in which he was made to feel like a Jew:

> Plötzlich bin ich gezwungen, mich als Jude zu fühlen, was in meinem Leben in der DDR so gut wie keine Rolle gespielt hat. Der Grund dafür ist nicht etwa eine besonders starke Präzens von Judentum, sondern ich begegne, leider nicht selten, Äußerungen von Antisemitismus, deren Objekt nicht unbedingt ich, manchmal aber auch ich bin. (Becker 1980: 53)

I hope to have shown throughout this chapter, where all the work discussed so far was written during or very shortly after Becker's time in the GDR, that such claims of Becker's

Jewishness playing 'so gut wie keine Rolle' there are somewhat questionable. Nevertheless, Becker did not experience overt expressions of anti-Semitism in the GDR to the same extent as he did in the West, where in 1983 he received death threats after discussing his Jewish life and concerns about anti-Semitism in West Germany on Radio Bremen's talkshow 'Drei nach neun'. (BStU MfS AP 2275/92) Indeed, the threats, in the form of letters and telephone calls, were taken seriously to the extent that Becker was temporarily placed under 24-hour police protection. Interestingly, contradicting his comments in the questionnaire discussed above, Becker later denied ever having experienced anti-Semitism directly. 'Ich hatte es [...] niemals mit antisemitischen Reaktionen auf mich zu tun, nie, nicht eine Sekunde, weder in der DDR noch seitdem ich im Westen bin. [...] Obwohl ich mich nicht wie ein hundertprozentiger Jude fühle, wäre meine Reaktion darauf so, als wäre ich ein zweihundertprozentiger.' (Koelbl 1997: 215-6) This comment shows that the threats Becker received would have served to dramatically increase his feeling as an outsider in the West and explain also his continued preference for setting his work in the GDR.[24] Moreover, it is a possible reason for Becker's return to the theme in his writing of the plight of the Jew in post-war German society. Although *Bronsteins Kinder* is set in the East, it is stated quite clearly in the novel that Jewish survivors of the Holocaust are not able to assimilate in the West any better than in the GDR.

From the time when this novel was conceived of until just before its publication, it was to be called *Wie ich ein Deutscher wurde.* However, Becker received such negative responses to this idea that he changed it. As Becker wanted to give his fictional family a name, 'der ein wenig jüdisch klang, aber keine Karikatur war' (O'Doherty & Riordan 1998: 14), he chose *Bronsteins Kinder* for the new title, as this placed the emphasis on the main characters in the novel, namely Hans and his sister Elle. From this one can assume that the object of the initial title was Hans Bronstein, the narrator. Born well after the end of the war and brought up in the GDR, Hans strives to be as German as his name. He feels utterly 'überfordert' (BK: 14) by the situation in which he finds himself and tries repeatedly to reason with his father and his two accomplices (Kwart and Rotstein), that they should hand Heppner, the guard, over to the police. For Hans, the meaning of justice, or 'Recht', is synonymous with the state's justice system and is also something in which he believes, with which he can identify. Hans does not feel the same way about Heppner as

[24] This is discussed in detail in 3.3.4.

the kidnappers do: 'Es ist mir nie gelungen, ihn vom Herzen zu hassen' (BK: 261) and reacts to the situation 'fast wie ein Normaldeutscher'. (Werner 1997: 243) David Rock argues 'it is precisely Hans's identity as a German which is called into question through the "Jewish" events in which he becomes embroiled, for the young narrator himself, very much against his will, occasionally feels Jewish'. (Rock 2000a: 87) I will argue later that Hans' German identity is undermined even prior to this.

In the same way as the narrator in 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte' suffers a sense of alienation from his roots, Hans also has very little knowledge about his Jewish background. When he stumbles across the kidnappers and their prisoner in the house, Hans is told that Heppner worked in Neuengamme. At the time, faced by his father, Kwart and Rotstein, Hans refuses to admit his ignorance and claims he knows what this means. However, it transpires that for Hans, Neuengamme is nothing more than a 'böses Wort' and only by looking it up in an encyclopedia does he discover it was a concentration camp where 82 000 people died. (BK: 32)

For O'Doherty (1998: 53), the original title of the book, *Wie ich ein Deutscher wurde,* 'clearly suggests the adoption of this identity instead of a Jewish one. Indeed, the tone of the novel suggests that it is not possible to be both Jewish and German. As such it will be necessary for Hans to choose'. As he feels his German identity being challenged by the events in which he has become involved, Hans chooses to steadfastly reject his Jewish identity, publicly at least. When applying for a place at university, Hans has no qualms about mentioning his victim status, although he refuses to admit this to his girlfriend's parents: 'mein Abiturzeugnis ist gut, und Hinterbliebener zweier Opfer des Naziregimes bin ich auch, was soll da schiefgehen'. (BK: 11) Yet when his girlfriend, Martha, is offered a part playing a Jewess in a film set during the war, Hans is far less charitable, as this involves a public statement of Jewishness. Rather than joining Martha in her delight at having won the part, he remarks disparagingly that she was probably only chosen '[weil] sie aussah, wie [der Regisseur] sich eine hübsche Jüdin vorstellte'. (BK: 113) Similarly, when Hans wants to move out of Martha's parents' flat (where he has been living since Arno died), he refuses to go to the office at which victims of fascism can apply for support, although he knows this is the place most likely to be in a position to help. Martha's film, described as a somewhat uninspiring tale of evil Nazis and persecuted Jews, becomes a constant bone of contention in Martha and Hans' relationship. Although Hans is happy for Martha to spend her wages on him, he finds it unpleasant, 'eine jüdische Abstammung

oder ein jüdisches Gesicht zu Geld zu machen'. (BK: 213) On visiting the set to see a day's filming, Hans notes that all the Jewish characters are played by actors who resemble the Jewish stereotype and is angered by this. 'Warum mußten Juden im Film von echten Juden dargestellt werden? Als Martha diese Rolle angeboten worden war, hätte sie antworten müssen: Nur wenn auch die SS-Männer echte SS-Männer sind.' (BK: 197)

Such scornful comments from Hans are not limited to Martha's film. In his rejection of a Jewish social identity, Hans often makes racially insensitive, or even anti-Semitic comments in a manner reminiscent of Aron in *Der Boxer*. He talks of his father's funeral 'mit den paar kleinen Juden' (BK: 8), calls Martha's (almost accurate) attempts at working out why he is fighting with his father 'jüdische[n] Spitzfindigkeiten' (BK: 170) and compliments Martha on her costume for the film: '"Der Stern steht dir gut", sagte ich. "Wirklich."' (BK: 197). Similarly, having spent all the housekeeping money on his own amusement to the point where there is no food left in the house, Hans plans in his head arguments he can use to extract more money from his father. '*Du verwechselst mich mit deinem Nazi, warum sonst gibst du mir nichts zu essen?* Oder: *Glaubst du, jeder Jude sollte wenigstens einmal im Leben anständig hungern?*' (BK: 243) Hans's jocular or even cruel comments about Jewishness are a form of rejection of this identity. On the one hand he aims to show how in denoting something to be Jewish and at the same time different he puts distance between himself and it, and on the other hand his mockery is aimed to show how insignificant such issues are to him. Becker, who was well aware by this point of the impossibility of rejecting a Jewish social identity, is possibly ironising his own earlier futile attempts to do so. Indeed, Hans's recurrent preoccupation with the subject belies a deeper importance, something which does not go unnoticed by the comparatively well-adjusted and assimilated Martha:

> "Ich weiß seit langem, daß man über ein bestimmtes Thema mit dir nicht reden kann", sagte sie. "Kaum fängt ein Wort mit Jot an, bricht dir der Schweiß aus. Die wirklichen Opfer wollen andauernd Gedenktage feiern und Mahnwachen aufstellen, und du willst, daß geschwiegen wird. Du bildest dir vielleicht ein, das wäre das Gegenteil, aber ich sage es dir: es handelt sich um dieselbe Befangenheit." (BK: 251)

Martha's comment here suggests that this attitude of Hans' predates the events narrated in the novel. Hence Hans' German identity was called into question by his Jewish ancestry even before his discovery of Heppner in the forest. The dual narrative structure serves to further emphasise the difference between Hans' identities, the past tense indicating his

seemingly secure life as a German and the present tense dealing with the new aspects of his Jewish identity he is now forced to contemplate. Carmel Finnan shows that such a rupture in chronology is a common feature of Shoah narratives and 'reinforces the ambiguity and fragmentation of the lives being reconstructed'. (Finnan 2000: 449)

Free of this 'Befangenheit' is Hans' sister, Elle, who was born before the war and entrusted to the care of a German family during the Holocaust, where she was so badly treated that she was permanently psychologically damaged. After the war she occasionally attacks people physically, her victims seemingly chosen at random with the exception that she has never attacked a child. According to Heidelberger-Leonard (1997: 203), 'sie [fungiert] als ausgelebtes *alter ego* des Bruders, der bei seiner rigorosen Selbszensur möglichst jede Leidensregung von vornherein in sich abzutöten trachtet'. In this way Elle is spiritually free from the 'Befangenheit' that plagues her brother, yet this physical expression of her psychological suffering means she is committed to a *Heilanstalt.* As her attacks are random and spontaneous, they can neither be predicted nor prevented, Elle remains physically imprisoned within the boundaries of the institution, the possibility of her ever assimilating into society removed from her permanently.

1.5.2 Arno: Und wer war das Opfer?

While Hans' efforts are concentrated on constructing a German identity, Arno cannot bring himself to identify with the (East) German state in any way. Even immediately after the war Arno was an outsider, as it is suspected he was a black marketeer, working on a large enough scale to be able to afford a luxurious weekend house, and it seems also that Arno's attempts to assimilate to some degree into society met with obstruction. After Arno's death Hans goes through all his paperwork and discovers a series of letters from the authorities rejecting Arno's application for permission to open a photography shop. 'Er muß den Plan mit Hartnäckigkeit verfolgt haben, denn zwischen der ersten Antwort und der letzten, der achten, liegen anderthalb Jahre.' (BK: 262) Although on the surface Arno may seem assimilated into GDR society, his actions prove otherwise. When Hans discovers the three kidnappers and their prisoner in the house he is deeply shocked. 'Ich hatte geglaubt, nach dreißig Jahren könnten sie wie normale Menschen leben, und plötzlich dieses Zimmer; als hätten sie drei Jahrzehnte lang nur auf eine solche Gelegenheit gewartet. Als hätten sie, wenn sie sich scheinbar normal verhielten, nur eine Maske getragen.' (BK: 27) Hans-

Georg Werner (1997: 240) shows how Arno 'konterkariert damit das ideologisch retuschierte Bild vom Juden in der DDR'. Implied here also, through the characters Kwart and Rotstein, is the idea that Arno is not an exception, but that the seemingly assimilated generation of Jewish survivors is wearing a mask. Indeed Arno tells Hans that he and his accomplices 'sich darin einig seien, in einem minderwertigen Land zu leben, umgeben von würdelosen Menschen, die ein besseres nicht verdienten'. (BK: 80)

Like Hans, Arno hated to be seen as a victim and saw any special treatment offered to the *Opfer des Faschismus* as a 'Demütigung'. (BK: 53) However, because Arno continues to see all Germans as perpetrators he continues to carry the identity of victim himself. When Hans asks for an explanation of the kidnapping from the beginning Arno replies: '"Von Anfang an", wiederholte er belustigt. "Von meiner Jugend an vielleicht?"' (BK: 79) That Arno continues to feel persecuted is, ironically, explained to Hans by Heppner, who understands why he was kidnapped even though none of the kidnappers was in Neuengamme personally. '"Die fühlen sich noch umzingelt, die denken, daß unsereins auf eine Gelegenheit wartet, sie wieder in die Baracke zu stecken."' (BK: 103) The use of 'unsereins' here emphasises the heightened sense of difference between Germans and Jews. By their continued existence the Jews once again make Heppner guilty; in their presence he is no longer a citizen of the GDR, rather he becomes a concentration camp guard. Heppner's theory is supported by Arno's suspicious attitude and his behaviour towards any stranger over the age of fifty, which tends towards 'Ungerechtigkeit und Grobheit'. (BK: 58) Here the reader is reminded of Becker's comments in his 1988 essay 'Gedächtnis verloren – Verstand verloren',[25] where he claimed to feel 'umzingelt' by 'Faschismus-Reste' in West Germany. (EG: 83)

In addition to the identity of victim, Arno rejects also the identity of Jew. For him Jews are nothing but an invention, a theory Hans has heard many times:

> Es gebe überhaupt keine Juden. Juden seien eine Erfindung, ob eine gute oder eine schlechte, darüber lasse sich streiten, jedenfalls eine erfolgreiche. Die Erfinder hätten ihr Gerücht mit so viel Überzeugungskraft und Hartnäckigkeit verbreitet, daß selbst die Betroffenen und Leidtragenden, die angeblichen Juden, darauf hereingefallen seien und von sich behaupteten, Juden zu sein. Das wiederum mache die Erfindung um so glaubwürdiger und verleihe ihr eine gewisse Wirklichkeit. [...] Am verwirrendsten aber sei es, daß so viele Menschen sich in ihre Rolle als Juden nicht nur gefügt hätten, sondern von

[25] This essay is examined in more detail in 3.3.4.

ihr geradezu besessen seien und sich bis zum letzten Atemzug dagegen wehren würden, wollte man sie ihnen wegnehmen. (BK: 48)

However, while Arno may not be a religious Jew, the fact that he can speak Yiddish fluently reaffirms his Jewishness and victimhood in the context of post-war Germany. The men internalise this identity and do indeed continue to live as victims, not least because of Heppner's presence in their lives.

While the emphasis of the novel lies with Hans and his (in)ability to integrate into post-war Germany, the concept of victim is also problematised through the character of Arno, as the event of the kidnapping causes the kidnappers and Heppner to exchange roles. Indeed, the first reference to Heppner in the novel is as a victim, when Hans stands in the entrance hall to the house and hears screams in response to Arno's punches. Of course Hans immediately recognises his father's voice, but 'wer war das Opfer?' (BK: 21) Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (1997: 202) examines this problem as a progression beyond *Der Boxer*, where Mark develops from victim to perpetrator as he fights in Israel, then dies, once again a victim (of war). 'In *Bronstein* wird der Vater als Opfer zum Täter, um dann, auch er, als Opfer seinem Racheakt zu erliegen. Einmal Opfer, immer Opfer? Es kann kein Zufall sein, daß ausgerechnet der historische Täter, der KZ-Aufseher Heppner, unversehrt in den Westen entkommt.' This idea is supported by the actions of the kidnappers when they have their prisoner. Beyond interrogating Heppner, and to no particular end at that, they are clueless as to what to do with him, not thinking of how the situation will end. Aware of this, Hans decides to free Heppner for the sake of his father. 'Konnte es nicht auch sein, daß Vater mir eines Tages dankbar war, wenn ich ihn von dem Gefangenen befreite?' (BK: 293) Even before his death, Arno has become a victim of his own actions.

1.5.3 Aber du bist mein Feind: Generational Conflicts

Before Hans goes to the weekend house for the final time with the intention of freeing Heppner, he knows the more likely impact this will have on the already tense relationship between him and his father. 'Wenn es getan ist, stehen wir unwiderruflich auf verschiedenen Seiten.' (BK: 296) From the moment Hans finds out about the kidnapping, he and Arno are engaged in a conflict that is representative of the differences between their generations. Hans finds it unacceptable that the three men take matters into their own hands, believing instead that Heppner should be handed over to the police (ie. the State) to

be dealt with. For Arno, Hans's detached approach to the situation is just as incomprehensible. '"Warum bist du so gleichgültig?" fragte er. "Warum macht es dich nicht böse, wenn du an ihre Opfer denkst? Ich meine nicht nur die Toten, ich meine auch Leute wie mich und Elle. Ein bißchen mehr Aufgeregtheit bitte."' (BK: 128) Peter Hanenberg (1992: 61-2) argues that the men kidnap Heppner in the first place because 'die offizielle Bestrafung der Täter entlastet die Opfer nicht'. In fact the official punishment is worthless in the eyes of the kidnappers, as Arno explains to Hans:

> Es sei zwar richtig, daß der Aufseher hart bestraft würde, wenn sie ihn einem Gericht übergäben, aber warum? Doch einzig deshalb, weil zufällig die eine Besatzungsmacht das Land erobert habe und nicht das andere. Wenn die Grenze nur ein wenig anders verliefe, dann wären dieselben Leute entgegengesetzter Meinung, hier wie dort. Wer stark genug sei, könne diesem deutschen Gesindel seine Überzeugungen diktieren, ob er nun Hitler oder sonstwie heiße. Darum hätten sie beschloßen, die Sache selbst in die Hand zu nehmen. Wenn es ein Gericht gäbe, daß von ihnen anerkannt würde, wären sie nie auf eine solche Idee gekommen. (BK: 80)

This rejection of the state law is synonymous with a rejection of the state itself on the part of the kidnappers here, while Hans' insistence that the authorities should be called is a declaration of his trust in the state.

There is a difference between the two generations which Kwart tries to explain to Hans. '"Es ist natürlich, daß wir verschiedener Meinung sind: du bist nicht im Lager gewesen"' (BK: 189), suggesting that this difference is fundamental and irreconcilable. The root of this difference is that none of the characters portrayed here is a practising religious Jew, rather '[a]lle Figuren werden durch die Vergangenheit zum Juden gemacht'. (Schenke 2000: 322) However, only the first-generation characters experienced these identity-defining events, whereas for the younger generation (personified here by Hans) such events are an unreachable part of history. As Hans becomes embroiled in yet another childish argument with his father he thinks: 'Jetzt rächte es sich, daß wir in der Vergangenheit immer nur über Leichtes gesprochen hatten, immer nur über Unverfängliches.' (BK: 73) Not only did Hans not experience the events which are used by others to define his identity, but he has also been denied learning about his roots by his father's silence, which in turn leads ultimately to this division between the two. At many points in the novel this estrangement is highlighted. 'Wir waren uns furchtbar fremd in diesem Augenblick' (BK: 72); 'Es befremdet mich, daß er so wichtige Ansichten immer

vor mir geheimgehalten hatte' (BK: 81); 'Er sagte, ich sollte lieber achtgeben, daß unsere Wohnung nicht verkomme, anstatt meine Nase in die Angelegenheit fremder Leute zu stecken. Er sagte wahrhaftig: fremder Leute.' (BK: 125) Hans is unable to understand his father, Kwart and Rotstein, let alone reconcile their actions with the ideology with which he has grown up. This estrangement between the generations leads to open hostility in the strained situation in which Hans and Arno find themselves. Hans tells Arno to stop treating him as though he were an enemy, to which Arno replies: '"Aber du bist mein Feind."' (BK: 184) The implication here is that with his 'German' mentality, Hans has come to represent the other to his father. However, due to his own victim status, Hans is still an outsider in this German society and as such finds himself lost between the two. In answer to his many questions to Kwart, Hans receives a piece of advice: '"Du solltest überlegen, zu wem du gehörst. Wenn du das beantworten kannst, erübrigen sich viele Fragen."' (BK: 139)

The division between the two generations is symbolised by a door in the flat which should connect Hans and Arno's rooms, but which is blocked on one side by a bookshelf and on the other side by a wardrobe. Through this door one night Hans hears the three men talking in his father's room. To his surprise he hears they are speaking Yiddish. Es war unfaßbar, daß Vater sich in dieser Sprache verständigen konnte [...]. Er hatte es bisher nicht nur vermieden, in meiner Gegenwart Jiddisch zu sprechen, er hatte auch nie angedeutet, daß er dazu imstande war. [...] [I]ch fühlte mich betrogen. [...] Nie zuvor war ich so gegen ihn.' (BK: 221) For O'Doherty (1998: 50), the fact 'that father and son do not even share the same first language make[s] the breakdown in communication virtually absolute'. Although Hans knows a few Yiddish words, '[e]s wäre mir nie in den Sinn gekommen, ein solches Wort zu benutzen, und wenn es ein anderer tat, überlegte ich unwillkürlich, welches Wort normalerweise dorthin gehörte'. (BK: 221-2) Hans has strong feelings of aversion towards the Yiddish language itself, a language which is synonymous with 'Jewish', while for him German is 'normal'. However, much to his astonishment Hans finds that if he makes an effort to overcome his 'Widerstand gegen die anmutlosen, verwachsenen Töne' (BK: 222) he is able to understand much of what is being said. The men are talking not about the kidnapping as Hans expects, but about their experiences during the war. At this point Hans loses interest 'für dieses Thema war ich zu müde' and decides to go to bed. 'Ich schlief ein, doch nicht versehentlich: ich entschied mich für die bessere Möglichkeit.' (BK: 223) Here I concur with Werner's analysis: Hans 'will sich

innerlich auf die Probleme der älteren Generation nicht einlassen.' (Werner 1997: 245) The incident is reminiscent of Hans using an encyclopaedia to learn about Neuengamme. Not only does Hans not feel able to approach such subjects with his father, his interest is also academic, rather than personal. To an even greater extent than the narrator of 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', Hans is alienated from the events the men are talking about. For him, they are just stories and as such distant and unreal.

1.5.4 Das Lager im Kopf: Jewish Images and their Perpetuation

After his father's death Hans goes to live with his (Jewish) girlfriend and her parents, Hugo and Rahel Lepschitz. 'Lepschitz hat damals gesagt, der Sohn seines besten Freundes sei ihm nicht weniger lieb als ein eigener, und sie haben mich zu sich genommen. Dabei hatten die beiden sich kaum zehnmal im Leben gesehen.' (BK: 7) This exaggeration on Lepschitz's part, Hans suspects, is because Hugo and Rahel 'es noch kommen sehen, daß Martha ihnen einen Nichtjuden anschleppt'. (BK: 115) Again, as he did not experience the camp directly, Hans denies to Hugo being the son of a victim of fascism on the grounds that '"[a]ls ich geboren wurde, war er längst kein Opfer mehr". "Das ist man ein Leben lang, mein Lieber", sagte Lepschitz, "das wird man niemals los"'. (BK: 52) Hans fails to understand the permanent psychological suffering of his father's generation, or that, as Schenke (2000: 322) claims, '[d]ie Vergangenheit ist in der Gegenwart präsent'. One reason for this continued existence of the past, or the camp, Schenke argues further, 'liegt in der Perpetuierung der Ausgrenzung, am Weiterwirken der Imagotypie in den Köpfen den Menschen, Deutschen wie Juden. Juden schließen sich in ihr eigenes Ghetto ein und akzeptieren nur Leute "von uns"'. (Schenke 2000: 323) This 'Ausgrenzung' is particularly clear in the case of Lepschitz, who as we have noted, is keen for his daughter to marry a Jew. Lepschitz is the only character in the novel who doesn't find it strange that Hans has no friends, 'weil unsereins besonders penibel zu prüfen habe, mit wem er sich einlasse'. (BK: 117) Similarly, when Kwart finds out that Lepschitz is involved in the sale of Arno's house he asks for reassurance that Lepschitz is 'einer von unseren Leuten'. (175)

There is a small element of hope at the end of the novel as Hans realises he is wallowing in self-pity and needs to take positive action to improve his life. He also begins to accept the effect the Holocaust has had on his own life: 'womöglich bin ich doch ein Opfer des Faschismus und will es nicht wahrhaben'. (BK: 224) The fact that Hans begins

to recognise his conflicting identities of Jew and German is a positive sign, but the adoption of the identity of victim means also accepting and internalising the role of the outsider and as such the novel can be seen to be largely pessimistic. There is no suggestion of Hans wanting to positively search for or engage with his past, as was the case with 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', rather the tone is one of resignation.

As in *Der Boxer* one decade earlier, the first generation Jews construct their identities as outsiders as they are unable to detach themselves from the experiences and suffering of the past. Now the emphasis has shifted to second-generation Jews in Germany, suggesting that this victim identity is self-perpetuating. The members of the second generation, cut off from their roots by a wall of silence, find themselves alienated from this past on the one hand while on the other they are expected to show 'ein bißchen mehr Aufgeregtheit' (BK: 128) about it, along with an affinity to 'unseren Leuten'. (BK: 175) This dichotomy leads them also to isolation. Carmel Finnan cites Laura Waco's autobiography as an example of the complexity of the relationship of the children of Jewish survivors to Germany when, as a child, Waco confides in her favourite teacher her family's plans to move to Canada: 'Ich kann [dem Lehrer] einfach nicht erklären, daß ich auch eine Jüdin bin, nicht nur eine Deutsche, und daß ich eigentlich nicht weiß, was ich sein soll oder sein kann oder sein darf, deutsch oder jüdisch, daß ich es nicht in einen Topf werfen kann.' (Waco 1996: 219, cited in Finnan 2000: 456) The only character in the novel who can act freely and does not suppress her thoughts or emotions is Elle, yet the violent physical attacks with which she manifests these thoughts mean that she is institutionalised and thus any choice or possibility of living in, let alone integrating into, mainstream society is removed from her.

1.6 Conclusion

The question of Becker's Jewish identity remains the most constant focus throughout his work and is one which is never resolved. The fact that Becker began his writing career with a focus on Jewish identities shows how early in life this became a central concern to him, despite his claims to the contrary. Becker describes this preoccupation as something over which he had no control and which took him by surprise every time he felt compelled to write on a Jewish theme. 'Als ich *Jakob der Lügner* geschrieben hatte, war ich sicher, nun mit der sogenannten Judenthematik fertig zu sein. Dann schrieb ich den *Boxer* und

sagte, da ist diese Sache schon wieder. Dann schrieb ich *Bronsteins Kinder* und hatte mich zum drittenmal geirrt.' (Traub & Becker 1992: 105)

Jakob reads quite clearly not only as a reaction against the literary discourse of the GDR which perpetuated the notion of Jew and victim as synonymous terms, but is above all an attempt at subverting the persistent image in the (East) German consciousness of the Jew as strange and other, an image which had constructed Becker's position as an outsider in the GDR. In *Der Boxer*, this theme is continued in the examination of Aron Blank's plight as a Jew in post-war Germany, where he is neither able nor inclined to assimilate into society, the sense of difference between Jew and German still being felt too strongly on both sides. The focus of *Boxer* is arguably also more personal than *Jakob*. Although the novel still seeks to undermine essentialist concepts of a predetermined Jewish identity, the emphasis has now shifted to dealing with Becker's relationship with his father and with his own Jewish past from which his father sought to protect him. Hence Becker takes up in *Der Boxer* in earnest the process already begun in *Jakob*, namely that of trying to rediscover his lost memories, or create possible alternatives. The unreliability and subjectivity of memory as a tool in identity construction plays an important role in all of the works discussed here. This is also shown to be a two-way process as Becker uses his work to reconstruct his lost memories and admitted that he could have begun at some point 'manche meiner Erfindungen für Erinnerung zu halten'. (EG: 114) In his chapter on *Jakob*, where he argues 'that our sense of having a stable identity presupposes our being able to tell coherent stories about ourselves', Jefferson Chase (2000: 328) correctly shows how Becker could 'choose between countless narrative models with which to tell his story. Becker himself was demonstrably aware of making these choices, of steering his narrative in self-selected directions'.

Thus the character of Mark can been seen as representing one possible direction Becker's life could have taken. By travelling to Israel, Mark is seeking the access to his Jewish identity which Aron tried to shield him from, a process Becker takes up in his final Jewish writings of the 1970s. The death of his father meant simultaneously the loss of the final possible link he had to his Jewish roots. An initial begrudging acceptance of a Jewish identity in 'Mein Judentum' gives way in 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte' to an almost wistful longing for this part of his past, replacing Becker's earlier vehement rejection of his Jewishness which we saw in *Jakob*. Here the focus shifts for the first time to the predicament of the second-generation Jew in Germany and the isolation members of

this generation feel both from their German surroundings and their Jewish roots. The majority of Becker's Jewish characters' reasons for being Jewish lie in the past, yet this past was only experienced and remembered by the first generation and as such creates a conflict between the generations which the characters portrayed find impossible to overcome. With his lack of memories, Becker himself lies somewhere between the two generations.

Becker carries the theme of generational conflict through to *Bronsteins Kinder* and on the whole, as his Jewish work develops over the course of two decades, the tone becomes decidedly bleaker. The sense of being different, an outsider, was something that Becker felt he was initially able to overcome. Yet this optimism seems to have faded over the decades: While *Jakob* succeeds, for the duration of the novel at least, in breaking down the difference between the protagonist and reader, or here between victim and non-victim or even victim and perpetrator, *Bronstein* implies that the difference between generations of survivors is absolute and irreconcilable. For Becker, a 'Gnade der späten Geburt' simply did not exist for survivors. Instead members of the second generation assume also the Jew/victim identity and remain outsiders (a feeling no doubt increased for Becker by his experiences of anti-Semitism in the West), although they are detached from their Jewish roots. Interestingly, and despite having grown-up sons of his own, Becker never shifts the focus on again to the third generation, although the outcome of *Bronsteins Kinder* is bleak enough to suggest that were Becker to have written a sequel, the next generation of protagonists would have suffered the same crises of identity as their fathers.

Although the Jewish theme is not a major focus of any of Becker's fiction after *Bronsteins Kinder*, it continues to feature in his essayistic writing. One element that remains particularly prominent here is the search for his forgotten past, the attempt at unlocking the mystery of his childhood and indeed this becomes even more important as his work progresses. Becker's essay 'Die unsichtbare Stadt' (1990) describes how he stares at dozens of pictures which form part of an exhibition about the Łodz ghetto, yet the pictures do not provoke any memories for him. 'Wenn ich Erinnerungen hätte, müßten sie dort zu Hause sein, in jenen Straßen, hinter jenen Mauern, unter diesen Leuten.' (EG: 114) Becker's sense of alienation from his roots combined with a desire to remember the past is still present and seemingly more intense than ever here. 'Ich starre auf die Bilder und suche mir die Augen wund nach dem alles entscheidenden Stück meines Lebens. Aber nur die verlöschenden Leben der anderen sind zu erkennen [...] [I]ch möchte zu ihnen

hinabsteigen und finde den Weg nicht.' (EG: 117) This 'alles entscheidende[] Stück meines Lebens' represents a marked progression from 'Mein Judentum', where Becker concluded that if he were to try to solve the 'Rätsel' of his past, he would 'nur vergeblich versuchen, ein Geheimnis aufzuklären, ohne das mein Leben ärmer wäre'. (EG: 21) So while this mystery once seemed essential to the richness of his life, possibly a source of inspiration and creativity for Becker, he later appears desperate to solve it. After experiencing overt expressions of anti-Semitism in the West, Becker's sense of difference there is increased, and with it the desire to engage with his past, Jewish identity. Anti-Semitism caused him to feel 'als wäre ich ein zweihundertprozentiger [Jude]'. (Koelbl 1997: 216)

The majority of Jewish characters in Becker's novels find themselves in the diametrically opposed positions of being signified as a Jew through their social identities on the one hand, while, for a multitude of reasons, they seek to reject or are unable to assume this identity on the other hand. This dichotomy was something Becker was never able to resolve for himself. When asked in 1995 if he considered an open relationship between Germans and Jews to be possible, Becker replied, 'daß das Verhältnis zwischen mir und meiner Frau ein Musterbeispiel dafür ist', clearly defining himself as a Jew in contrast to his German wife. (O'Doherty & Riordan 1998: 17) However, in the final interview he gave before his death, Becker was asked what effect his Jewishness had had on his work, to which he replied: 'Nun, das sagen Sie so leichthin. Ich würde mit Ihnen zunächst über die Frage streiten, ob ich Jude bin oder nicht.' (Koelbl 1997: 215) In the same interview Becker also plays down the significance of his attempts at reconstructing his past through his writing. Hence Becker's Jewish identity remained problematic to the last. While he would still seek to reject this identity if it were imposed externally, he does not hesitate to define himself as a Jew in contrast to Germans, even when the German in question is his wife. This identity is constructed almost entirely through his social identity of Shoah victim and his own sense of difference to his surroundings. Becker has neither the memories nor any physical or human reference points to this part of his past, yet the factors which construct his Jewishness lie there. Becker's contradictory comments above show that Schenke's analysis of Becker's Jewish characters, namely that '[sie werden] durch ihre Umwelt [...] nur als Teil eines Kollektivs wahrgenommen, dem sie nicht zugehörig fühlen', is equally applicable to their author here. (Schenke 2000: 320)

Chapter Two – Shifting Writer Identities

2.1 Introduction

At the age of ten Becker wrote a poem of which his father was so proud that he continued to show it to visitors to their home for years afterwards. Becker later claimed that this was when he first became aware of his talents as a storyteller and knew at this young age that he wanted to become a writer. (Schwarzenau 1983: 12) Becker was actively writing for a decade before publishing *Jakob der Lügner.* As a philosophy student at the Humboldt University in the late fifties, Becker began writing scripts for a student cabaret and after he was expelled from university in 1960 he worked initially as a freelance writer, occasionally producing texts for the 'Distel', the leading political cabaret in East Berlin. Becker wrote scripts for DEFA throughout the 1960s.

Although Becker began his writing career during a period of tight cultural restrictions, most notably those which followed the building of the Berlin Wall, he was initially prepared to put his trust in the state and in the positive role literature had to play in its development. In common with the majority of more established East German authors, such as Hermlin, Strittmatter, Fühmann and many others, who either supported the building of the Wall wholeheartedly or at least accepted it, Becker was not initially critical of this development, hoping that it might make it possible for other restrictions to be lifted.[26] 'I wasn't happy about the wall, but I felt it was necessary and I accepted it. [...] I convinced myself that the wall might even help matters. [...] Not much came of this hope, however.' (Zipser 1978: 411) This was a common sentiment of the time, as Joachim Lehmann (1991: 121) shows: 'Nach dem Mauerbau 1961 war die gemeinsame Hoffnung von Schriftstellern und Literaturkritikern: Da dem Klassenfeind der Zutritt nun verwehrt sei, könne die Literatur auf Schönfärberei der Verhältnisse verzichten und die Probleme des sozialistischen Aufbaus offener beim Namen nennen.' Becker was not the only one for whom these hopes were an optimistic point of departure.

Indeed, after the increasing restrictions imposed in the cultural sphere during the 1950s which had caused writers such as Heinar Kipphardt and Uwe Johnson to leave the GDR at the end of the decade, the thaw in cultural policy of the early 1960s allowed writers to explore new modes of literary expression and break away from the task of

[26] In reaction to the Berlin Wall, Hermlin declared his 'uneingeschränkte ernste Zustimmung', Strittmatter agreed it was required, 'um einen Kriegskeim zu ersticken' and Fühmann justified the Wall as a necessary 'Grenzbefestigung'. (cited in Emmerich 1996: 179)

producing socialist realist literature. A final but unworkable attempt had been made to revive this hitherto sacrosanct literary form with the launching in 1959 of the *Bitterfelder Weg*, whereby workers and authors were encouraged to exchange workplaces and write about their experiences of this, but this initiative had little appeal to younger authors like Becker. He would probably have shared Andrea Jäger's sense of the contradictions inherent in the concept of socialist realism: 'Die Literatur sollte zeigen, daß die Identität staatlicher und individueller Interessen bereits im sozialistischen Staat aufgehoben war *und* welch großer Anstrengungen es noch bedurfte, dieses Ziel zu erreichen.' (Jäger 1991: 141)

Becker's generation was rejecting this notion of literature and embracing a more subjective narrative stance which engaged with the problems of the individual in GDR society. It was not convinced by the *Ankunftsliteratur* produced under the aegis of the *Bitterfelder Weg*, named after Brigitte Reimann's 1961 novel *Ankunft im Alltag*, a predictable tale of three school leavers who struggle through but eventually triumph over the various problems and challenges presented by their jobs to integrate into society as mature adults. Many younger authors were now producing literature critical of the state as the comparatively open cultural climate offered the opportunity for a more open discussion of the GDR's problems than Reimann had dared to attempt in her novel. Hence literature from the early 1960s began to display a new 'uneingepaßte[ ] Subjektivität' (Emmerich 1996: 190) which continued to develop through the decade and emerged fully in the 1970s. Authors rejected the formulaic journey to the happy ending that characterised *Ankunftsliteratur*; in contrast 'die literarischen Beispiele des *Nichtankommens* der Helden sich häuften – oder unter "Ankunft" etwas ganz anderes verstanden wurde: nämlich das Zu-sich-selbst-Kommen, die Selbstverwirklichung eines Individuums über eine Integration in die Gesellschaft hinaus oder sogar jenseits von ihr.' (Emmerich 1996: 194) Examples of this subjectivity are evident in Becker's cabaret work and more notably in *Jakob*, on which Becker began work in the early 1960s, where the narrator continues to be isolated from GDR society due to his past as a Holocaust victim.

As the post-*Bitterfelder Weg* relaxation of restrictions in cultural policy proved to be all too brief and the initial optimism felt after the building of the Wall waned, disenchantment grew among the younger generation of authors from the mid-1960s. In 1965 it became illegal to attempt to publish anything in the West without first offering it to a GDR publisher, most of which were state-owned. Furthermore, before a text could be published, it first had to be licensed by *Die Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel*,

which allowed absolute authority of the state to be imposed also over all material published in the GDR. The Eleventh Plenum of the SED central committee in 1965 confirmed the party's hard-line stance against any literature which expressed doubt in GDR socialism - an attitude Becker had already dealt with in satirical terms in his cabaret texts. In his text 'Tendenz fallend', written in the mid-1960s, Becker is still more critical of opportunist authors' willingness to conform than he is of the authorities who reward such conformity. East Germany's involvement in the military crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 served to further disillusion those young writers who had hitherto believed in the state.[27]

Among the authors becoming more vocal in their criticism following the disillusionment provoked by the Eleventh Plenum and the crushing of the Prague Spring is Christa Wolf in her novel *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1969). This depicts a search for individuality by a character unable to integrate easily into society because she refuses to compromise her socialist values the way most other citizens do. Similarly, Brigitte Reimann leaves behind the naïve optimism of her *Ankunft im Alltag* in her semi-autobiographical novel *Franziska Linkerhand* (1974), which depicts the problems experienced by a young architect attempting to transform her ideas into reality in the alienating environment of a provincial 'Neustadt'. As we have seen, Becker had already expressed in *Jakob der Lügner* an element of the *uneingepaßte Subjektivität* referred to by Emmerich as the common feature of this group of works. Now his second novel, *Irreführung der Behörden*, shows how the protagonist's 'arrival' in and superficial integration into literary social circles is only possible by his boundless readiness to compromise. The result for Gregor Bienek is that he becomes isolated from himself, self-hating and self-pitying, and of course the implication is that the type of 'Nichtankommen' portrayed in *Christa T.* would have permitted Gregor to reach a degree of self-fulfilment yet simultaneously have isolated him from society. The many biographical similarities between Becker and his protagonist emphasise that this is a very personal novel for Becker and one which represents a self-critical exploration of the processes he was undergoing himself as he adopted the identity of writer. The themes of conformity and self-censorship, briefly apparent in Becker's cabaret texts, now become the central focus of his writing.

By 1971 it appeared that a new, more liberal era was commencing in cultural politics as Honecker replaced Ulbricht at the helm of the SED. In December of that year

[27] See section 4.3.1 for Becker's reaction to this.

Honecker declared new freedoms for literature and art: 'Wenn man von der festen Position des Sozialismus ausgeht, kann es meines Erachtens auf dem Gebiet von Kunst und Literatur keine Tabus geben. Das betrifft sowohl die Fragen der inhaltlichen Gestaltung als auch des Stils – kurz gesagt: die Fragen dessen, was man die künstlerische Meisterschaft nennt.' (Berbig et al. 1994: 387) Indeed in some ways it seemed that this was a genuine attempt at liberalisation by the Party. Many works which had previously been forbidden, such as Reiner Kunze's *Brief mit blauem Siegel*, were eventually published in the GDR. Similarly, Plenzdorf's controversial and highly critical *Die neuen Leiden des Jungen W.* entered the sphere of public debate as it was published in *Sinn und Form* in March 1972. A year later it appeared in book form with Hinstorff and Plenzdorf received the Heinrich Mann prize from the *Akademie der Künste.* This ease in restrictions was by no means comprehensive. Volker Braun's *Unvollendete Geschichte*, for example, was printed in *Sinn und Form* in 1975 but waited another 13 years until finally being published as a book in the GDR in 1988. Nevertheless, for the next few years there was a genuine sense of optimism that the situation for GDR writers was improving. Although not published until 1973, Becker had actually completed *Irreführung* by 1971. The new thaw in cultural policy heralded by Honecker's 'no taboos' speech made it possible for the novel to be published at all and would have thus served to dispel some of this uncertainty Becker felt with regard to his newly adopted identity of writer.

It was during this period of cautious optimism that Becker was gaining prominence as a writer in both Germanys. The publication of *Irreführung der Behörden* in East and West Germany confirmed Becker's status as a promising young author. As further affirmation of his identity as a writer, Becker was presented with the prestigious *Literaturpreis der Freien Hansestadt Bremen* in 1974 and one year later he received the *Nationalpreis der DDR.* In 1973 Becker was also elected to the executive committee of the *Schriftstellerverband der DDR*, of which he had been a member since 1968, and asked to speak at the VII *Schriftstellerkongreß* in November of that year, an event which confirmed the more liberal literary trends of the times. As vice-president of the *Schriftstellerverband* Hermann Kant spoke at the Congress, reiterating 'der Abschied von einem Namen wie "Bitterfelder Weg"' (Kant 1974: 35) and supporting the new subjectivity in GDR writing. Kant speaks of: 'ein neues Selbstverständnis, das sich aus neuen Aufgaben und bewältigten Aufgaben ergibt; das sich auf eigene Erfahrungen gründet [...]; ein Selbstverständnis, das auch zusammenhängt mit der besonders seit dem VIII. Parteitag gesellschaftlich gefestigten Einsicht in die Unaustauschbarkeit, Unersetzbarkeit

künstlerischer Arbeit'. (Kant 1974: 29) Becker's speech, entitled 'Über verschiedene Resonanzen auf unsere Literatur', focused ostensibly on West German critiques of East German literature, condemns the tendency of western critics to politicise GDR literature and judge a text on its critical content rather than on its literary merit. However, many of the criticisms Becker levied at the West and the pressure it exerted on GDR authors were also clearly applicable to the East, and Becker's speech reinforces the Congress's message of independence: 'Ich nehme mir das Recht heraus, in einem Buch genau das zu sagen und das zu beschreiben, worüber ich etwas zu sagen und das zu beschreiben ich für richtig halte. Und ich nehme mir ebenso das Recht, genau das wegzulassen, was mir entbehrlich scheint.' (Becker 1974: 59) Furthermore, Becker repeats his intention to continue to tackle contentious issues in his writing. 'Denn wir sind uns im klaren darüber, daß es keinen Zustand geben kann, in dem das Hinweisen auf Mängel überflüssig geworden ist, der somit ein Ende aller Bemühungen war.' (Becker 1974: 60)

At this time too, Becker was beginning to discuss his view of his role as an author and explore his reasons for writing. In addition to his assertions of independence as a writer, Becker explained in a 1974 interview that for him, being a writer meant engaging with the social and political processes around him. Hence the public figure status he gained as a recipient of prestigious awards and through his participation in high-profile literary events such as the Congress above was a fundamental component of his identity as a writer. This ability to participate in and influence events around him was key to Becker's understanding of his role as a writer, an understanding clearly influenced by the official GDR notion of a *Literaturgesellschaft*,[28] a concept which envisaged a relatively open, accessible literature able to reach a wide audience and thus have a significant effect on society. This formed a fundamental part of Becker's motivation for writing:

> Zu den Motiven gehören der Wunsch und die Absicht, in gesellschaftliche Prozesse einzugreifen, die um mich herum ablaufen. [...] Meine Motive fürs Schreiben sind, Amüsement zu erwecken, unterhalten, ohne es bei dieser Unterhaltung bewenden zu lassen. Meine Motive fürs Schreiben sind auch egoistischer Natur. Ich schreibe gern. Schreiben bedeutet für mich eine Möglichkeit der Selbstverwirklichung. (Lübbe 1974: 525)

[28] This phrase stemmed from the GDR's first Minister for Culture, Johannes R Becher, for whom literature was 'das höchstentwickelte Organ eines Volkes zu seiner Selbstverständigung und Bewußtwerdung'. (cited in Emmerich 1996: 41)

From these comments it is clear that for Becker, the personal and the socio-political are closely related; his personal sense of identity as a writer is created in part by his belief in his ability to shape the events around him.

The latter part of the 1970s certainly provided Becker with ample opportunity for involving himself in social processes. In early November 1976 Becker protested against Reiner Kunze's expulsion from the *Schriftstellerverband* (punishment for writing his critical book, *Die wunderbaren Jahre*, which was published in the West), denouncing this decision as an attempt at intimidating critical writers such as himself. (Gilman 2002: 144) Any repercussions which could have arisen for Becker from this protest, however, were overtaken by the events of 16 November, when the critical lyricist Wolf Biermann's GDR citizenship was revoked while he was performing in concert in the Federal Republic.[29] Clearly Biermann had only been granted permission to travel to the West in order for the authorities to have the opportunity of permanently ridding themselves of the troublesome singer. Outraged at such action by the Party, twelve prominent intellectuals, including Becker and authors such as Stephan Hermlin, Christa Wolf, Sarah Kirsch and Volker Braun, published an open letter protesting against the expatriation and requesting that Biermann be allowed to return to the GDR.[30]

In addition to the professional affront Becker felt at Biermann's expatriation, there was also a deep sense of personal rage. Becker and Biermann had been friends since the late 1950s, when the actor Manfred Krug, with whom Becker shared a flat at the time, and whom Biermann knew from East Berlin's theatrical circles, had introduced the pair. Slightly older and professionally better connected than Becker, Biermann had helped Becker make the necessary contacts to begin his work in cabaret. As well as signing the protest letter himself, Becker also tried to persuade colleagues from the film industry to declare their support for Biermann (albeit with very limited success). He later refused to apologise for his actions. For his unrepentant stance with regard to Biermann and support for Kunze, Becker was expelled first from the SED, of which he had been a member for almost twenty years, then from the committee of the *Schriftstellerverband* in December

[29] The precise events surrounding Biermann's expatriation and its consequences are well documented and do not need to be repeated here. For recent detailed accounts which draw heavily on official documentation of the time see Roland Berbig's *In Sachen Biermann* and Renate Chotjewitz-Häfner's *Die Biermann-Ausbürgerung und die Schriftsteller*.

[30] The statement was signed by Jurek Becker, Volker Braun, Sarah Kirsch, Christa Wolf, Franz Fühmann, Stephan Hermlin, Stefan Heym, Günter Kunert, Heiner Müller, Rolf Schneider, Gerhard Wolf and Erich Ahrendt. For the full text of the open letter see Chotjewitz-Häfner et al. 1994: 249.

1976. When the union elected a new committee four months later, Becker decided to terminate his membership altogether. 'Durch den neugewählten Vorstand fühle ich mich nicht repräsentiert noch glaube ich ernstlich, daß er meine Interessen vertritt. Ich sehe daher keinen vernüftigen Grund, länger in einem Verband Mitglied zu sein, der sich fast einmütig einen solchen Vorstand wählt, und erkläre hiermit meinen Austritt.' (Gilman 2002: 158) Hence, after almost a decade of membership, Becker sought to distance himself from the professional body which had both represented and confirmed his identity as a writer in the GDR. Now, after the Biermann affair, Becker was projected into the role of dissident intellectual on a public level and *Schlaflose Tage*, his first novel after the controversy, only confirmed this unwanted social identity.[31] Becker claimed retrospectively that it was in an attempt to regain some control over his identity as a writer that he decided to move temporarily to the West:

> Ich war in der DDR in der letzten Zeit sehr aufgeregt und habe nur noch reagiert. Und mein Schreiben glich einem Bellen, einem aufgeregten Bellen. Und wenn ich es mir ansah, entsprach das nicht meinen Vorstellungen von Literatur, und ich mußte mir die Frage stellen, ob Schriftsteller zu sein dasselbe ist wie Widerstandskämpfer zu sein. Und das ist nicht dasselbe. Ich mußte mich für eine der beiden Karrieren entscheiden. (Koelbl 1997: 216)

The focus of *Irreführung* had been self-censorship and the inherent problems this caused for authors, and Becker had suggested this was something which an author could control. Now there is a marked shift in this focus to the problem of censorship by the authorities, and an unpublished text written in the late 1970s, 'Protokoll eines Gesprächs, für das sich kein Partner findet', shows Becker no longer deemed it possible to remain in the GDR and retain his integrity as a writer. Moreover, in his volume of short stories and essays, *Nach der ersten Zukunft*, Becker attacks the GDR readership for what he perceives as its cowardice in always looking to authors to voice oppositional opinions. He is critical of the GDR public's readiness to look to literature as a source of *Lebenshilfe* and the attendant pressures this puts on writers. In the GDR Becker felt that within his identity as a writer he was projected into the role of educator by the Party and that of dissident by the readership, a dichotomy that was neither desirable nor sustainable. The implications of these dialectic expectations for a writer's sovereignty, which for Becker meant 'independence as a writer in the sense of being in

[31] See section 4.3.3 for a fuller discussion of this issue.

complete artistic command of his material' (Rock 2000: 25), are then explored in the short story 'Großvater' and a piece just four lines long entitled 'Wenn auch nur eine Meinung', both published in *Nach der ersten Zukunft.*

After moving West to escape political constraints on his writing, Becker found that he continued to be projected into the role of East German dissident, a label he sought to reject. Still more problematically, after the Student Movement of the 1960s, West German literature had become increasingly depoliticised during the 1970s, something which challenged Becker's fundamental understanding of his role as a writer. The notion of there being a distinction between political activity and their aims as writers 'would seem to be shared by many major [FRG] writers of the 1980s'. (Bullivant 1989: 382) After the period of the 1960s when literature had been pushed into a political role, brought about, as Fulbrook (1992: 282) has shown, first of all by the smug consensus under Adenauer in the 1950s then by the need for extra-parliamentary opposition during the Grand Coalition of the late 1960s, many writers were thankful to finally be relieved of this burden. The older generation of writers, such as Böll, Enzensberger and their contemporaries, whose work had always hitherto comprised an element of political commentary, had, Bullivant (1989: 382) claims, 'gone into early retirement, while statements made by younger writers had revealed no burning commitment to the role which their elders had previously occupied'. The ascent of the Greens to parliament established an alternative to the SPD and a principled political opposition to the (Conservative) government, removing this pressure from authors. Walser claimed to feel 'entlastet' by the rise of the Greens (cited in Bullivant 1989: 383), freed from political involvement and instead able to concentrate on his creative writing (although he continued to make statements as a prominent political figure into the *Wende* period and beyond). For Becker, this release from political and social responsibility was in fact a negative development, as it represented the loss of key reference points which he had previously used to construct his identity as a writer. Becker later referred to his belief that he could influence society through his work as 'Selbstüberschätzung', but claimed nevertheless that when he began a new book he needed 'die Überzeugung, daß es ein trauriger Verlust wäre, wenn das Buch ungeschrieben bliebe'. (Hage 1986: 334)

This loss of orientation brings about a crisis of identity for Becker as a writer in the 1980s. This is reflected in comments in interviews and in his fiction, where he is clearly attempting to come to terms with the increasing insecurity he feels as an author. By the end of the decade, in *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller*, a series of three essays, Becker seems to

have resolved many of these tensions. The essays represent a theoretical evaluation of his development as an author, beginning with the dichotomous pressures writers faced in the GDR from the state and the readership and moving onto the similar problems Becker experienced in the West in asserting his integrity as a writer. The series concludes with an exploration from Becker of the role of literature and the author in contemporary society. When read together with Becker's acceptance speech for the *Hans-Fallada-Preis* in 1990, these essays suggest that it is only by subscribing to a dialectical notion of the writer as someone who is able to exert an educational social influence yet remain detached from social pressures that Becker is able to overcome the professional disorientation he experienced since leaving the GDR. Indeed, Becker now seems to relish the contradictions and tensions inherent to his self identity as a writer and he tackles these problems in a subversive way, no sooner establishing a position than undermining it.

Becker's final novel, *Amanda herzlos*, fictionalises these theoretical debates and continues the focus on East Germany, spanning the time Becker 'lost' there after his move to the West. Displaying the renewed confidence in his writing he had established in his essayistic work, Becker sets himself a new challenge in *Amanda* in that he creates his first female protagonist and satirises his identity as an author through his male narrators, who are themselves writers by profession. Further, Becker embraces a post-modern aesthetic once again with a narrative structure that encourages the reader to view reality as multi-layered and subjective. Risking the wrath of the critics by deliberately ending his novel just before the *Wende*, Becker asserts his sovereignty over his work, rejecting any politicisation of his identity as a writer and refusing to particpate in the *Literaturstreit*. Within the novel Becker explores his lost identity as an East German writer, making Amanda's consecutive relationships with the three narrators representative of different stages of his writing career and of his battle to maintain his integrity as a writer. Again the concept of social identities is thematised, in particular through the complex narrative structure, and we see how the novelist Fritz Hetmann first becomes a dissident against his will then internalises this identity. Fritz's writing lives up to the expectations of others and censorship becomes the central focus of his writing. *Amanda* also problematises the thematic of writing. Through his depiction of Fritz writing fiction about his past, Becker is taking a wry look at the way he himself may have used his writing to reinvent parts of his past.

2.2 Irreführung der Behörden

2.2.1 Cabaret

As we have seen, Becker considered his first work as a writer to be during his time at university in the late 1950s, when he wrote and directed the texts for a political student cabaret, texts which eventually gave him access to the 'Distel' as a scriptwriter. (Zipser 1978: 410) Becker's archive at the *Akademie der Künste* contains many of these cabaret texts, some of which are undated but it can be assumed that the majority date from this time. Here I will examine two of these texts, 'Et jibt...' and 'Tendenz fallend'. Written in Berlin dialect, 'Et jibt..' is a short piece, a verse of seven stanzas each beginning with 'Et jibt...' and ending: 'Det is zwar noch keen Beenbruch / doch ärjerts einen sehr.' The use of local dialect throughout, indeed even in the title, gives the text a familiar feel and could serve to soften the overtly political message of the verse if performed on stage. While there is no mistaking the criticism contained within the text, as Becker initially attacks the all-pervasive politics of the GDR and the hypocritical double standards that accompany them, the blame is not laid solely at the Party's feet: Becker ends the piece by criticising the people for their passivity and silent acceptance of their situation in a stanza that could have been written about Gregor Bienek, protagonist of the as yet unwritten *Irreführung der Behörden*:

> Et jibt, det sach ick rasch noch,
> und denn ist wirklich Schluss,
> ja, Leute jibts, die denken:
> "Et kommt, wie't kommen muß."
> Die freun sich üba jarnischt,
> die ärjert ooch nischt mehr.
> Det is zwar noch keen Beenbruch,
> doch ärjerts einen sehr. (AdK, JBA, 79)

Amongst other satirical texts is the piece 'Tendenz fallend' about a writer named Unverzagt who has taken his latest piece of work to a publisher. However, the man he sees has the position, not of *Lektor* as one might expect, but of *Ablehner*. The *Ablehner* tells Unverzagt he finds the work excellent. 'Es hat Anliegen, es hat Geist, es hat Standpunkt, es ist kritisch, brilliant geschrieben - mit einem Wort - nicht zu machen.' (AdK, JBA, 84) Because the work is critical of a minister, it will neither be performed nor published. The

Ablehner advises Unverzagt to rethink the piece. Following this advice Unverzagt rewrites his work several times, redirecting his criticism at a *Staatssekretär* then an *Abteilungsleiter*, but all to no avail. Each time his work is rejected and the author hopes that by eventually rewriting it so that blame is directed at a mere *Pförtner,* his work will be accepted. Unverzagt takes this final version to the *Ablehner* who responds: 'Na, ich bitte Sie! So viel Aufwand - ein ganzes Stück - wegen einem Pförtner!' (AdK, JBA, 84)

Despite the humour of the piece, it is clear that Becker was aware of the difficulties of being an author in the GDR from the earliest stage of his writing career. As in 'Et jibt...', Becker is critical of conformity here too – Unverzagt is prepared to make all manner of concessions regarding his work in the hope of it being published. However, all he succeeds in doing is gradually turning quite brilliant prose into something worthless and he becomes miserable as a result. This piece reads almost as an anticipation of Gregor and *Irreführung.* We see also the absolute inflexibility and hypocrisy of the state in that the *Lektor* has the position of *Ablehner* and constantly contradicts himself in the telephone conversations we witness:

1. Telephon klingelt. Ablehner in den Hörer:

Sie müssen mehr an das Publikum denken.

Legt auf. 2. Telephon klingelt. Ablehner in den Hörer:

Was geht uns das Publikum an? (AdK, JBA, 84)

The fate of Unverzagt's work seems inevitable; it cannot be published in its original form yet is not worth publishing in its revised form, much like Gregor Bienek's 'Straßenbaugeschichte' in *Irreführung der Behörden,* to which we will now turn our attention.

2.2.2 Erste Geschichte

The protagonist of *Irreführung der Behörden* is Gregor Bienek, an East Berlin law student, whose only motivation for studying are the grant cheques he receives each semester, and who would much rather be an author, if only his work was published. The young Gregor, encouraged by his girlfriend, Lola, takes his stories to various publishing houses, where they are either rejected, or changes to the texts are demanded that Gregor is not prepared to make. However, as Gregor begins to find some success in his writing and gives up his studies, he becomes increasingly willing to make concessions in his work, and by the end

of the novel he is forced to recognise that he and his writing now conform utterly to the expectations of the authorities. Unsurprisingly, given the implied political criticism inherent to the story, the majority of East German critics reviewed the novel unfavourably in comparison to *Jakob der Lügner* and disapproved of the subjectivity of the narrative structure.[32]

While the focus in *Jakob* showed a preoccupation with Becker's past, this now shifts to a concern with his current situation, as the production of literature and an author's relationship to his work become the central themes of the novel. Although Gregor and his author can by no means be seen as identical, their situations are certainly very similar, as Becker explained in interview: 'Im Unterschied zu meinem ersten Buch habe ich hier eines geschrieben, bei dem ich natürlich erheblich befangener bin. Ich bin ja mittendrin. Es geht ja um etwas, worin ich bis über beide Ohren stecke.' Becker goes on to say that this was a story in which he hoped to participate and that to a much greater extent than had been the case in *Jakob,* the book includes 'eigene Erfahrungen, eigene Erlebnisse, eigene Probleme'. (Corino 1974: 13) Furthermore, two decades after the publication of *Irreführung der Behörden*, Becker admitted to David Rock (2000: 104) that many of Gregor's stories were actually stories of his own that had been rejected by the authorities. So if *Jakob der Lügner* represented a literary attempt at coming to terms with his past and his Jewish identity, *Irreführung der Behörden* can be read as Becker's attempt at coming to terms with his recently adopted identity of 'writer' and all the potential pitfalls and dangers which accompany this new identity. Becker is turning the spotlight on to the processes which he himself was undergoing at the time of writing and had possibly undergone with *Jakob der Lügner.*

After the complex narrative structure of *Jakob, Irreführung der Behörden* initially seems fairly straightforward, as it is narrated in the present tense by the first person narrator and protagonist. Whereas Becker had clearly distanced himself from his narrator in *Jakob*, there are many similarities between Becker and Gregor here. They are the same age and both engaged in studies in which they have very little interest. They leave university in 1960 to pursue careers as writers and, as Sander Gilman (2002: 113) points out, Gregor is very similar to Becker's early forename of Georg, the initials 'GB' which Lola has engraved on a cigarette lighter for Gregor are actually Becker's own previous initials. Although such similarities should by no means suggest that author and narrator can

[32] See section 4.3.2 for a brief discussion of some of these reviews.

be seen as identical here, they do emphasise Becker's closeness to the situations portrayed in the novel.

The first of the novel's three sections, 'Erste Geschichte', fills 150 of the novel's 250 pages and the events narrated all take place within the month of December 1959. The novel begins inside the office of an editor to whom Gregor is trying to sell his latest idea for a story and here the structure becomes more complex as we see the first of many stories within the story. As with *Jakob*, the theme of story-telling as a source of enjoyment once again emerges. The story here is that of Toni, who meets a girl, Rita, on the tram and invites her to join him for an ice-cream. They begin a fairy-tale existence together with Toni able to conjure up anything Rita wishes for. There is a brief breakdown in their relationship when Toni suspects Rita is less in love with him than with his magical abilities, but eventually they are reunited and lead a happy life together, this time in a realistic rather than a fairy-tale world. The concept of coming to terms with the disillusionment of an ideal can, of course, be read as comparable to Becker's relationship with GDR socialism.[33]

However, there is a further element to the story which so far remains unexplored. A common complaint of Becker's, both during and after his time in the GDR, was the level of pressure put on authors in socialist countries, not only by the censor, but also by the reading public: 'Von einem Schriftsteller wird Lebenshilfe erwartet.' (Rumler & Schwarz 1977: 131) Thus it seems valid to claim that the Toni and Rita story can be read as an early indication of the way Becker felt pressured as a writer to produce the impossible, to be a magician, in much the same way Rita places such demands on Toni: 'Rita wünscht sich alle möglichen Sachen, weil sie merkt, daß er zaubern kann.' (IB: 11) In this way we can read the relationship between Toni and Rita as suggestive of the author-reader relationship in the GDR.

This argument is further supported by Rolf Michaelis' claim that with this story 'Gregor erzählt die erste Geschichte, die er mit einem Mädchen hat' (Michaelis 1973: V), as his relationship with Lola goes through the same phases of idealism and infatuation followed by the inevitable onset of disillusionment, and Gregor's initial battle for integrity is fought with and eventually lost to Lola. Just as Rita places demands on Toni, so Lola attempts to manipulate Gregor and his writing. She urges him to write something, '"was ihnen unter die Haut geht"' (IB: 22) and they frequently discuss Gregor's work together,

[33] See section 4.3.2 for an analysis of this element of the story.

Lola representing in turns the reader and the authorities in these conversations, and Gregor is forced to acknowledge, 'daß Lolas Anwesenheit nicht ohne Folgen für mein Verhalten bleibt.' (IB: 143) This is exemplified in the penultimate chapter of 'Erste Geschichte' when Gregor discusses with Lola his new 'Straßenbaugeschichte' about three would-be bank robbers who help the local authorities build a motorway out of town in order that they will have a fast, safe escape route for themselves and their loot when they rob the bank. The authorities are ignorant of the criminals' true motivation, believing they are offering their assistance for the common good and make the robbers into minor local celebrities. In the end the motorway is completed just in time for the thieves to rob the bank and escape with the money only days before the bank is relocated to more secure premises. Initially Gregor and Lola argue about the story with her adopting the role of a *Lektorin*, giving numerous reasons why the story will not be accepted. Then, as herself, she admits that she does like the story, but that she finds the ending weak:

> Weil nichts Überraschendes mehr passiert. Die Leute machen einen Plan, führen ihn aus, und alles klappt. [...] Nehmen wir mal an, sie brechen am Ende nicht mehr in die Bank ein, [...] weil die Arbeit beim Straßenbau sie verändert hat, wenigstens einen oder zwei von ihnen. Arbeit verändert Menschen, daran glaubst du doch auch? Wäre es nicht überraschender und trotzdem logischer, wenn sie sich die Möglichkeit für den Einbruch zwar geschaffen hätten, nun aber plötzlich keine Lust mehr dazu haben? Statt des Bankraubs ziehen sie weiter, um die nächste Straße zu bauen, weil sie jetzt finden, dort wäre mehr zu holen. Weil sie Blut am ehrbaren Leben geleckt haben. Geht das nicht so? (IB: 149-150)

By this point of the conversation Lola has dropped the role of *Lektorin*, yet her arguments remain the same. The fact that Gregor has to ask whether he is answering her or the editor shows that for him, Lola has become synonymous with the authorities. Gregor, who gloomily reflects that he would like to know, 'wie man sich gegen Lolas stummen Einfluß zur Wehr setzte' (IB: 143) promises to consider her proposals, and the final chapter of this section of the novel ends with Gregor telling Lola: 'ich habe es mir überlegt, natürlich hatte sie mit ihrem Vorschlag recht'. (IB: 156-7) In this way the 'Erste Geschichte' is not only that of Toni and Rita as a parable of the relationship between Gregor and Lola, but also a parable of the relationship between author and reader represented by Gregor's losing battle to maintain control over his work, trapped in the tension between self-expression and the pressures others exert on him.

2.2.3 Der Kulturbetrieb macht den Künstler kaputt

The above comment is taken from Marcel Reich-Ranicki's (1973: 25) largely favourable review of *Irreführung der Behörden* and is, in his opinion, a central focus of the novel. Although the seven years after 'Erste Geschichte' are narrated in as many pages in diary-form under the heading 'Roman', we see over this period the dramatic change in Gregor from idealist to conformist. The subtitle 'Roman' refers to Gregor's one and only novel, the idea for which he conceives of in the first year of this section and work on which continues until the end of the section. The inspiration for the novel, which Gregor decides immediately to call 'Renovierung eines Luftschlosses', is a West German who chose to move to the GDR and work on a *Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft (LPG)*, and whom Gregor meets during his *Ernteeinsatz* as a student. Although not all of this man's expectations had been fulfilled, he is on the whole pleased with his decision.

Urged on by Lola, Gregor begins the new decade completing a story for which he had won a contract a short time previously, but when he refuses to make a few minor changes to aspects of the story which he considers to be particularly important, Gregor's publishers reject the text and do not contact him again. However, with the help of Lola's mother Gregor is able to leave university and make a living writing articles and reviews for newspapers and also enters discussions regarding making his 'Straßenbaugeschichte' into a film. 'Ich erzähle von Anfang an Lolas Version, man gibt mir einen Vertrag und drei Monate Zeit.' (IB: 162) This contract marks the onset of Gregor's slide to conformity as his acceptance of Lola's abysmal alternative ending to his story becomes official. Around this time Gregor also loses his *Ausweis* and must apply for another: 'die Rubrik "Beruf" bereitet mir Kopfzerbrechen. Im alten Ausweis hat dort "Student" gestanden, ich schreibe hinein: "Schriftsteller"'. (IB: 162) Here Gregor makes the difficult and very conscious decision to become a writer and soon afterwards realises 'wie es möglich ist, sich in der Arbeit zu vergessen'. (IB: 163) The 'Kopfzerbrechen' Gregor feels about this decision possibly reflects in an exaggerated manner the way Becker felt himself while writing *Irreführung der Behörden*. He had become a member of the *Schriftstellerverband* before beginning work on the novel and joined the PEN club in 1972 while trying to publish it. Like Gregor's *Ausweis*, membership of these groups for Becker represented the confirmation of his newly adopted identity of writer with its attendant privileges,

compromises and responsibilities. In this novel far more so than was the case in *Jakob*, Becker has his fictional figures grapple with many of the problems he himself was experiencing at that time. As he mirrors these key events in his life through his fiction, Becker is both examining and contributing to the discursive processes which shape his identity as a writer in the GDR.

As with the decision to accept Lola's changes to his 'Straßenbaugeschichte', another turning point comes when the film proposal of this amended version is rejected and a very dispirited Gregor begins work on a new film which he finds utterly 'belanglos'. (IB: 164) Lola once again encourages Gregor: 'sie meint, Frohsinn zu erzeugen wäre eine nützliche Tätigkeit. Aber Frohsinn um welchen Preis?' (IB: 164) Yet Gregor is able to overcome his reservations when he is paid for this trivial film remarking that the 'Geld, das ich wieder erhalte, kommt mir erschwindelt vor. Es gibt Schlimmeres'. (IB:164) It can hardly be coincidence that during this time of frustration at having what he considers to be his meaningful work rejected on the one hand while being paid handsomely for trivial scripts on the other hand, Gregor conceives of his 'Maskenball' story about a 'Mann, der es vorzieht, sein gutes, ehrliches Gesicht zu verbergen. Seine Tarnung besteht aus ständiger Zustimmung und einem Parteiabzeichen, auf diese Weise hofft er, in den Besitz eines bescheidenen Glücks zu gelangen'. (IB: 164)

It is only when Gregor begins work on his novel that he has the feeling 'über einer lohnenden Arbeit zu sitzen'. (IB: 165) Yet the excitement and success following the release of his film mean that he temporarily has to break away from the novel. 'Ich spüre, wie er mir immer fremder wird.' (IB: 166) The completeness of Gregor's transition to conformity is symbolised by the change in the title of his novel demanded by the publisher. '"Renovierung eines Luftschlosses" erscheint ihnen zu intellektuell für die ansonsten erfreulich normal erzählte Geschichte, wie ich höre. Das ist kein Beinbruch, wir einigen uns auf einen neuen Titel, "Die Wendung", der ist bestimmt nicht zu anspruchsvoll.' (IB: 167) For Philip Manger (1981: 160), this new title 'can only refer to [Gregor's] slide from idealism into the compromise with reality' of the type already discussed with reference to the Toni and Rita story. Further, John Wieczorek (1990: 644) argues that Gregor's attitude is typified by 'his readiness under pressure to accept a different title for one of his works [...] to sacrifice a title implying interaction between ideal and reality for something less controversial'. Indeed Gregor's reaction to the request that he change his novel's title –

'Das ist kein Beinbruch' – is highly reminiscent of the unpublished cabaret piece 'Et jibt...' and its criticism of such passivity and conformity.

During the 'Roman' section, during the time it takes Gregor to complete his novel, he becomes, as Josef Quack (1973: 594) has also shown, a 'Maskenball' character, choosing to hide his opinions and identity in order to achieve professional success. The disproportionate temporal structure of the narrative serves to emphasise this change in the protagonist, as the fiercely independent and idealistic student of 'Erste Geschichte' sees himself at the beginning of 'Zweite Geschichte' as 'zweckentfremdet', a machine working 'unterhalb ihrer Kapazität' and must ask himself 'wo sitzt der Verantwortliche für solche Pfuscherei, wer ist der Maschinist, wenn ich es nicht selbst bin?' (IB: 173) Gregor does nothing to halt the dismal situation, rather he remains passive and submits yet another script which he knows is simply 'eine einzige schmückende Beifügung, von der ersten bis zur letzten Seite, also eine von den Arbeiten, deren ich mich schon lange verdächtige'. (IB: 194) Rather than assert himself, Gregor internalises the discourse around him, and allows his identity to be defined by those who tell him his talent lies in not in serious literature, but in 'komische Konstellationen' (IB: 165) and he realises that others will soon begin to see him as 'jemand, der ich nicht sein will'. (IB: 173)

The novel ends with an argument between Lola and Gregor as she reads his latest piece of work and describes it as 'nicht der Rede wert'. (IB: 242) She finds that anyone reading Gregor's work would come away with the impression that 'dein einziges Motiv zu schreiben wäre, niemandem zu nahe zu treten, keiner soll etwas dagegen haben. Du berechnest alle Einwände im voraus und umgehst sie'. (IB: 247) Lola dismisses all Gregor's attempts to redirect blame on to her, insisting his conformity is the result of his desire to buy himself an easy life. The argument that ensues essentially gives voice to Gregor's own internal battle which he has thus far suffered in silence and having overcome his initial rage at Lola, Gregor is forced to concede she is right:

> [W]ieviel Wahrheit steckt in ihrer Anklage? Wieviel macht es mir aus, derjenige zu sein, als den Lola mich gezeichnet hat? Soll ich ihr einfach sagen, ich bin, wie ich nun einmal bin, wenn es dir nicht paßt, dann suche dir einen anderen? Aber wen soll ich mir suchen, ich muß mit mir zusammenleben. [...] natürlich hat sie recht, alles in allem. Und ich weiß das schon lange, wahrscheinlich länger als sie. (IB: 249)

Through his 'Maskenball' behaviour, by living only up to the expectations of others, Gregor loses his integrity and identity as a writer and becomes isolated.

Although *Irreführung der Behörden* is clearly critical of the state mechanisms of power that exert such pressure on Gregor in the first place, I suggest the novel is far more an exploration of the problem of conformity and self-censorship, a theme that Becker had already raised in a far more jocular fashion, as we have seen, in the cabaret piece 'Tendenz fallend'. As a writer, Gregor always chooses the path of least resistance. His unhappy situation at the end of the novel is far more a result of his own readiness to compromise in order to avoid conflict and lead a trouble-free (not to mention extremely affluent) existence, than it is the result of ominous threats or severe repercussions for any rebellious behaviour. Gregor is juxtaposed here with the character Simmel, his friend and a dramatist, whose general unpopularity Gregor ascribes to his insistence on giving an honest opinion of other people's work when asked for it and on refusing to compromise his principles. As Simmel seems to suffer no more severe consequences than this unpopularity within professional circles, it is implied that Gregor's self-censorship is a matter of choice and expediency rather than of necessity.

2.2.4 Sie erwarten von dir Aufrichtigkeit

As we noted in the introduction, *Irreführung der Behörden* is a novel very close to Becker and he admitted himself that some of his own experiences went into the novel. But can we read *Irreführung der Behörden* as a self-critical novel? Can it be argued that through the seemingly ambiguous narrative and a merely implicit criticism of the East German authorities with the lion's share of the blame landing with the protagonist, with the author, that Becker at an earlier stage of his career was guilty of a similar level of conformity and self-censorship as Gregor? The key to this question is in an accusation of Lola's to Gregor during an argument: '"Sie erwarten von dir Aufrichtigkeit, und sie haben ein Recht darauf, denn deine Arbeit wird fürstlich bezahlt. Aber was tust du? Du führst sie in die Irre und lieferst alte Hüte ab."' (IB: 248). While Lola is seemingly referring to Gregor's publishers and the authorities here with the pronoun 'sie', it is in fact left deliberately ambiguous as to whom this 'sie' refers. The 'Irreführung der Behörden' on the part of the author is simultaneously 'a kind of "Aufrichtigkeit" which not the authorities, but the other great 'they', the reading public hope for and have a right to'. (Manger 1981: 161) Through his constant and explicit criticism of Gregor, Becker dissociates himself from his protagonist who 'internalised the very arguments against which Becker protests'. (Wieczorek 1990:

645) Indeed, the strategy of deception Gregor employs – against the university, against his wife, even against himself – could, Martin Kane argues, 'be a broad hint that Becker intends his novel as an act of subterfuge directed at the smug prescriptiveness of cultural officialdom'. (Kane 1991: 174) Here it should also be noted that through Gregor, Becker is finally able to get into print many of his own stories, albeit in an abbreviated form, which had earlier been rejected by the authorities - 'Irreführung der Behörden' indeed. Although we will see in the next section that Becker was later to become aware of practising self-censorship on a subconscious level, here we must concur with Manger's claim (1981: 162) that far from submitting to the pressures surrounding him 'Becker has executed the double programme: a book that will "get under their skin" in a form acceptable for publication'.

So if Becker is able to undermine and mislead the authorities in this way and still get his work into print, does it suggest he is optimistic about his future as a writer in the GDR? The final conversation between Gregor and Lola ends on a note of reconciliation, and because Gregor acknowledges the choice that stands before him, namely whether to carry on as before or whether he should opt for a 'neue Zukunft' (IB: 249), the novel is essentially left open-ended. Becker claimed this lack of definite ending was deliberate, intended to give the reader the impression that for Gregor, everything was still to be decided 'aber nichts sei verloren'. (Lübbe 1974: 525)

2.3 Nach der ersten Zukunft

2.3.1 Die Spaltung der Persönlichkeit des Dichters

Although this analysis of *Irreführung* argues that Becker did not deliberately engage in self-censorship in the same way as Gregor Bienek, he did admit that the presence of the censor had had a strong effect on his work. Discussing this situation retrospectively in a 1992 interview, Becker explained: '"Jedes Buch in der DDR hat eine von zwei Bedingungen erfüllt: Entweder es war erlaubt oder es war nicht erlaubt. Eine dritte Möglichkeit gab es nicht."' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 118) Although relatively few books were forbidden, Becker suspected that many critical books were simply left unwritten because of the inevitable battle with the censor they would have precipitated, while every book that was published was then tainted with the stigma of being acceptable to the Party. Hence, within this politicised role as a writer, Becker realised that he was constantly behaving tactically, that he positioned himself and his writing in relation to the censor. Just before he

left the GDR, Becker described this tactical approach to his writing as a 'Verdrängungsmechanismus' of which he had only recently become aware and which he was determined to reject in favour of a more independent form of writing. (Rumler & Schwarz 1977: 130) Becker's claim that this self-censorship had been on a subconscious level and was something he 'amputated' as soon as he became aware of it is supported by the fiercely critical and polemical stance of *Schlaflose Tage* and thus cannot be seen to be comparable with the conformity of Gregor Bienek as discussed above. However, despite Becker's claims of a more independent stance here, *Schlaflose Tage* is still affected by the presence of the censor, but in a different manner to *Irreführung der Behörden.*

In his ironically titled essay 'Lob der Zensur', Karl-Heinz Jakobs describes these effects of censorship on an author's identity as '[d]ie Spaltung der Persönlichkeit des Dichters'. Jakobs argues that all authors in the GDR were effected by this in some way. A common strategy of the non-conformist author was to disguise criticism within a story, the form of self-censorship or 'Verdrängungsmechanismus' which Becker describes. '[I]ndem er, vom System ununterbrochen provoziert, sein Werk mit Informationen füllt, die eigentlich dort gar nicht hineingehören, verfälscht der Prosadichter den Erzählanlaß, trübt der lyrische Dichter seinen poetischen Anfall.' (Jakobs 1995: 187) Songwriter Bettina Wegner (1995: 325) admitted to this form of self-censorship after she was released from prison in 1968 and wanted to write a song about the *Stasi*. 'Hätte ich im Lied "MfS" benutzt, wäre ich gleich wieder im Gefängnis gelandet. So wurde aus MfS "Magdalena".'[34] Similarly, Wolfgang Schreyer chose to express his outrage at the Warsaw Pact countries' invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 by writing about the American military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, prompting the reader 'das Verhalten beider Weltmächte zu vergleichen'. (Schreyer 1995: 295)

In contrast to such prose which required the reader to read between the lines, Jakobs' essay claims that conversely 'manches Werk [erhält] durch den Einfluß der Zensur eine Schärfe, die ursprünglich vielleicht gar nicht beabsichtigt war'. (Jakobs 1995: 187) If *Irreführung der Behörden* can be said to have been affected in the first way Jakobs describes here, or by Becker's 'Verdrängungsmechanismus', then *Schlaflose Tage* is certainly a reaction against the repressive mechanism of censorship. Klaus Schlesinger (1995: 280) admited he reacted against the censor in much the same way. 'Mich haben

[34] This refers to the address of the Ministry building, which was situated on the corner of Normanenstraße and Magdalenenstraße.

gesellschaftliche oder staatliche Tabus immer provoziert. War es die Mauer, habe ich sie zum Thema gemacht. Hat die herrschende Ästhetik den Realismus favorisiert, habe ich einen surrealen Ansatz gesucht.' As a writer, Schlesinger continued to be affected by GDR censorship long after he had left for the West in 1980. 'Ich brauchte Jahre, um mich "frei zu schreiben" - ich meine die Fähigkeit, in Worte zu fassen, was ich empfand.' (Schlesinger 1995: 281)

Censorship remains a central focus of Becker's writing in his first book to be published after he moved to the West, *Nach der ersten Zukunft.* The collection of essays and short stories spans a wide thematic range, but there is a clear group of the texts which focus on the difficulties of being a writer and retaining one's integrity and identity in the face of so many opposing pressures. A case in point, the first text we will examine here, 'Protokoll eines Gesprächs, für das sich kein Partner findet', was published neither in the Suhrkamp edition in 1978 nor in the abridged Hinstorff edition which finally appeared in the GDR in 1986. Although Becker felt the text to be important, his editors in the East and West German publishers deemed it to be of inferior quality to the other pieces in the volume and Becker eventually agreed to leave it out. (BStU MfS AP 2275/92)

If *Irreführung der Behörden* had been left deliberately open-ended to suggest that Becker still felt able to position himself as a writer in the GDR, that he did not see his situation there as hopeless, then by the late 1970s in the aftermath of the Biermann affair this optimism had been destroyed. 'Protokoll eines Gesprächs...' is a debate between two unnamed people (A and B) about the options available to authors who wish to publish critical writing. The conversation opens with B posing the question: 'Was soll ein Schriftsteller tun, dem unser Land, so wie es ist, nicht gefällt?' (AdK, JBA, 103) confirming afterwards that the author in question is a socialist. A debate then follows on how this author, who B 'invented' at A's request in order to give concrete examples, should behave in society, how he should write and publish and interact with his surroundings.

That the participants in the conversation are given simply as A and B and that they are discussing a hypothetical author in a fictitious scenario highlights the purely theoretical nature of the debate taking place, emphasising that this is a indeed conversation, 'für das sich kein Partner findet'. From the title one gains the impression that the piece represents the type of open discussion Becker would have liked to have had in the GDR, one where he could speak freely and openly and ask direct questions until he receives a direct answer.

Yet on closer examination we see that while there is an open discussion of sorts, it is only between two individuals and does not take place on a public level. 'Genau das ist es, was mein Autor ablehnt. [...] Er will nicht interne Diskussion, er will die öffentliche.' (AdK, JBA, 103) Furthermore, no progress is made throughout the discussion, as A always insists on the inherent correctness of the Party, its methods and its opinions. B wishes to know whether the author would be able to publish or openly state his opinion even if it differed from that of the Party. A counters that an author does not always consider the effect his work can have and that someone, namely the Party, must take over responsibility here:

> B: Nehmen wir aber an, der Autor hat die Folgen seines Schreibens durchaus bedacht: er will die Folgen, er hält sie für wünschenswert, die Partei ist aber anderer Meinung. Was dann?
>
> A: Dann geschieht natürlich das, was die Partei für richtig hält, das wird Sie doch nicht wundern. Unsere Gesellschaftsordnung ist eine Diktatur des Proletariats unter Führung der Partei der Arbeiterklasse, und nicht eine Diktatur des Proletariats unter Führung dieses oder jenes Schriftstellers. (AdK, JBA, 103)

As publishing houses are synonymous with the Party, there is no way for this fictional author to publicly express his opinion. Speaker A suggests that maybe this author should consider whether he is really suited to his career in this country. Finally B says of the author: 'Er arbeitet, wie er arbeitet. Jetzt weiß er keinen Rat mehr. Er lebt, man muß auch das einmal erwähnen, von seinen Büchern, doch die druckt man nicht.' A replies: 'Ja das ist ein Problem. Aber es ist sein Problem.' (AdK, JBA, 103)

This conversation can be read as Becker's attempt at assessing his personal situation at the time when he had just left the GDR in order to regain control of his writing, an exploration of the problems he faced and their possible solutions. In 1979, he still claimed he wanted to return to live in the GDR, although in private conversations with Hinstorff Becker clearly made his return dependent upon *Nach der ersten Zukunft* being published. In this context the piece represents the antithesis of *Irreführung der Behörden* or 'Tendenz fallend', as it examines the choices available to those authors who, unlike the characters of Gregor or Unverzagt, are not willing to compromise their integrity or identity, and the piece ends on a very pessimistic note, creating a rather bleak outlook for Becker's future in East Germany. While 'Tendenz fallend' is clearly contemptuous of conformity, the almost slapstick comedy of the piece gives it an undeniably lighter and more humorous tone than that of this text written around a decade later. The fact that this is

a theoretical debate for which Becker cannot even find a partner, let alone bring into the public sphere in the form of a published text, is representative of the isolation he felt as an East German writer in the late 1970s. In particular, having resigned his membership of the *Schriftstellerverband,* Becker had severed the link to the physical embodiment of his identity as a GDR author and the discussion forum used to debate and construct this identity. This is reiterated by the very definite ending: 'Ja, das ist ein Problem, aber es ist sein Problem', which also suggests the problem is absolute and insoluble. Becker has realised that he would not be able to retain his integrity as an author in the East and thus sees his identity as a writer as irreconcilable with that of GDR citizen.

2.3.2 Eine schrecklich unsouveräne Situation

In addition to the focus on state censorship, Becker's work is now also concerned with another form of pressure he came under as a writer, namely that from the East German readership, something which he had already hinted at in the story of Toni and Rita in *Irreführung der Behörden.* As Joachim Lehmann shows, in the absence of an independent media, literature in the GDR assumed an *Ersatzfunktion* as the only place where differences of opinion could be voiced, albeit in the veiled form described by Schreyer and Wegner above. 'Literatur wurde zur Lebenshilfe: Sie teilte den Schmerz über die ausweglose Situation, steigerte ihn zum ästhetischen Genuß und ließ darüber hinaus die beinahe erloschene Hoffnung auf einen Sozialismus mit menschlichem Antlitz neuerlich aufleuchten.' (Lehmann 1991: 123) This concept of *Lebenshilfe* suggests also a level of complicity between writers and the readership, and indeed Wolfgang Schreyer claimed that writing criticism 'between the lines' established a sense of identification between author and reader in opposition to the censor. 'Da auch eher unterhaltende Texte regimekritischer Autoren in der DDR sehr aufmerksam gelesen wurden, ließ sich so hinter dem Rücken der Zensur ein Einverständnis mit zahlreichen Lesern herstellen.' (Schreyer 1995: 295)

However, this complicity with the readership brought its own expectations and pressures for authors, ones which were diametrically opposed to those exerted by the authorities. For Christoph Hein, speaking in 1990, the expectations of the readership were harder to counter than the pressures exerted by the authorities. 'Dem Druck des Publikums [...] konnte man sich kaum entziehen. Die Leser wollten hören, wie ich dem Honecker das Messer in den Leib stoße. Gefragt war nicht nur der kritisch-engagierte, sondern der

extrem politische Schriftsteller. Und das ist eine Gefahr für die Literatur.' (cited in Petersell 1996) Similarly, the lyricist Uwe Grüning felt that the integrity of his texts was corrupted by the presence of the censor and by the tendency of the readership to bestow on literature this *Ersatzfunktion*:

> [Der] Text hatte drei Autoren: den Schriftsteller, den Zensor und den Leser. Die Textleistung dieser drei war unterschiedlich und wechselte mit der zensoralen Wetterlage. Dabei mochte es vorkommen, daß ein Autor gar keinen Text zwischen den Zeilen geschrieben hatte: Die Deutungssucht von Zensor und Leser brachte einen solchen Text unweigerlich hervor. (Grüning 1994: 47)

Hence Becker was projected into the role of educator by the Party and that of dissident intellectual by the readership, a dichotomy that was neither welcome nor sustainable. The rejection of one of these imposed identities could be seen as conforming to the opposing set of expectations. These dialectic pressures had serious implications for Becker's identity as a writer in the GDR, a society he later described as '[eine] Gesellschaft von Feiglingen, die es gern sah, daß alles Aufbegehren an eine bestimmte Berufsgruppe delegiert wurde, die sich selbst aber still verhielt'. (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 117) Furthermore, Becker maintained that it was primarily for these personal rather than for political reasons that he felt compelled to leave the East, as this identity of dissident projected onto him by the East German readership put an enormous strain on his writing and created 'eine schrecklich unsouveräne Situation' in which to write. (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 116) In *Nach der ersten Zukunft* Becker now seeks to reject these pressures and restore his sovereignty as a writer.

2.3.3 Großvater

Becker wrote the short story 'Großvater', as he explained to David Rock, in the period immediately after he left the GDR in 1977. (Rock 2000: 23) It is the opening story of *Nach der ersten Zukunft* and takes the form of a dialogue between a grandfather and his grandchildren, who beg and plead with him to tell them one of his many stories. The grandfather is initially reluctant to tell the children a story, not least because he is uncertain of his memories and admits he often has to fill in gaps with his imagination rather than allow a story to end prematurely and disappoint his audience. '"Ich könnte sagen, jetzt kommt ein Stück, an das ich mich beim besten Willen nicht erinnern kann, und Schluß. Möchtet ihr das lieber?"' (NZ: 7) The implication, of course, is that the storyteller is

willing to sacrifice the truth in favour of the creative process. Indeed, before the grandfather will allow himself to be persuaded to begin one of his tales, he argues first with the children for his sovereignty as a narrator. He is also keen to emphasise that his story is subjective and a product of dubious recollections and that he resorts to imagination where memory fails him. '"Meistens habt ihr Glück, denn die Erinnerung kommt mir rechtzeitig. Aber nicht jedesmal, das sollt ihr ruhig wissen."' (NZ: 8) For Jürgen Egyptien (1997: 279) this concern with the creative process requiring in turn a certain 'Modifizierung der Wahrheit' is a central theme of the dialogue in which 'die Prinzipien eines Erzählens entwickelt [werden], das durchaus als Modell von Beckers eigener Erzähltechnik [...] gedeutet werden kann.'

While a storyteller's preoccupation with creativity is certainly an important aspect of the story, the claim that this is the central concern of the story is undermined, as David Rock has also shown, by Becker's explanation in 1991 that the grandfather is an old Party comrade being asked for details of embarrassing aspects of the Stalin era. For Becker the most important theme of the story is that of how to deal with the past. (Graf & Konietzny 1991: 51) The children are relentless in their questioning of the old man who becomes increasingly defensive and almost paranoid in his responses: '"Ihr wißt, daß es nicht wenige sind, die mir das Wort im Munde umdrehen?"' (NZ: 12) And when the children reassure him that he has told them this many times already, grandfather continues: '"Ich kann nicht vorsichtig genug sein. Sie prüfen jeden meiner Sätze. Sie drehen ihn fünfmal um, ob er ihnen etwas nützt, das heißt: ob sie ihn gegen mich verwenden können. Genau darum muß ich jeden meiner Sätze doppelt prüfen, vor ihnen."' (NZ: 12) Hence David Rock argues that it is not the creative process, 'but censorship – here, the self-censorship of writers under political pressure' that is the main concern of the story. (Rock 2000: 25) While I concur with Rock to an extent on this point, his analysis is perhaps a little one-sided, as it examines only the author-Party relationship and neglects the pressures the GDR readership exerted on authors.

The pressure a storyteller experiences from the public is represented in the way the children, the audience, persistently harass their grandfather, the narrator, into telling them one of his stories. Indeed the way in which the children swarm around the grandfather begging for a story is reminiscent of the way the ghetto inhabitants pester Jakob, Becker's most famous storyteller, for news in *Jakob der Lügner.* One particular scene comes to mind here: '[Die Juden] benehmen sich wie die Kinder, sie schwirren um einen herum wie

die Ausgehlustigen um die Litfaßsäule.' (JL: 79) As such, 'Großvater', like *Jakob,* can be read as a parable of the author-reader relationship in the GDR. In both this short story and the novel *Jakob* there is a passive audience coercing a storyteller (whom it has projected into a position of authority) to tell a story. The expectation of the public from its authors to provide *Lebenshilfe* is shown quite literally in *Jakob,* and is implied in the 'erste Geschichte' of *Irreführung* when Rita expects Toni to magically provide for her every wish. Just as the Jews in the ghetto ask Jakob for news even though they know this puts his life at risk, so too the children force the grandfather to compromise his safety in order that they experience the pleasure of hearing one of his stories. '"Ich [muß] jeden meiner Sätze doppelt prüfen, vor ihnen. Jetzt sagt mir: In wessen Interesse tue ich das?" "In unserem, das ist doch klar."' (NZ: 12)

The analogy between the grandfather and an East German writer is further hinted at in the opening lines of the story as the children begin trying to persuade the grandfather to tell a story with the argument: '"von wem sollen wir denn sonst etwas erfahren, wenn nicht immer wieder von dir?"' (NZ: 7) This seemingly innocent childish comment does, in fact, point to a main cause behind the inflated importance given to literature in the GDR. Becker elaborates on this in his 1990 essay 'Die Wiedervereinigung der deutschen Literatur':[35] 'In einer Umgebung, in der es keine auch nur annähernd freien Medien gab, [...] bleiben Bücher der letzte öffentliche Ort, an dem noch Meinungsverschiedenheiten ausgetragen wurden.' (EG: 120) The implication here is clearly that just as the grandfather represents the only source of information to the children, so too the reading public did not have access to political debate or discourse other that of literary fiction, which in itself had to pass the censor before it could be allowed into the public domain.

This theme of censorship remains prominent throughout the volume. Becker's attitude towards the unwanted politicisation of his identity as a writer is encapsulated perfectly in the shortest piece in *Nach der ersten Zukunft,* just a few lines long: 'WENN AUCH NUR eine Meinung verboten ist, geraten dann nicht alle anderen Meinungen in ein schiefes Licht? Und vergeht nicht gerade darum so vielen die Lust, eine erlaubte Ansicht zu vertreten, auch wenn es die eigene ist?' (NZ: 188) We see here what Becker referred to as 'eine schrecklich unsouveräne Situation' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 116), whereby he was projected into the role of dissident by the GDR readership. Becker felt that any apolitical comment he made or wrote would have been viewed as suspicious, while even if he did

[35] Originally a paper given at a symposium at Washington University, St. Louis in March 1990.

agree with the Party on certain issues Becker could not publicly declare this for fear of being seen as a conformist.

2.3.4 Sich vor Korrumpierbarkeit schützen

While Becker claimed he moved to the West primarily to protect his sovereignty as a writer and to be able to practice his chosen profession, he continued to feel heavily pressured by public opinion regarding his writing. Becker was still seen by the West German public and media to be a dissident and was expected to continue to take a critical line regarding the East. Becker was well aware that conformity or opportunism was 'kein DDR-spezifisches Problem' long before he moved to the West (Lübbe 1974: 522). In 'Der Nachteil eines Vorteils' Becker likens his situation on moving to the West to that of a penguin plucked from its natural habitat and moved to a zoo. Here it is exposed to countless alien bacteria against which its immune system knows no defence. These bacteria present no danger whatsoever to other animals, but for the penguin, who is only equipped to battle the cold, they could be deadly. 'Die Gewöhnungszeit sei lang und erfordere von den Pflegern außerordentliche Geduld.' (NZ: 13) In a 1990 interview with Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Becker confirmed that this was analogous to his feelings, not only during this time of transition for him, but also that he considered it to be an ongoing problem:

> Die größte Angst, die ich so für mich hätte, als Pinguin im Zoo, ist die Angst vor einer Art von Anpasserei, die mir zuwider ist, [...] die Angst, Ansichten anzunehmen, die mir eigentlich unbehaglich sind. Und da man nicht gerne die Ansichten anderer als die eigenen ausgibt, tut man immer mehr so, als wären es die eigenen. Ich versuche, mir das bewußt zu machen, um mich, so gut es geht, vor Korrumpierbarkeit zu schützen. (Arnold 1992: 13)

Although censorship by the authorities was no longer relevant to Becker as a writer in the West, as he was able to write and publish whatever he chose ('der Vorteil'?), he still felt that he came under pressure from the public, the media and elements such as capitalist market forces to adopt new opinions and ideals in place of those he believed in ('der Nachteil'?). Removed from his 'natural habitat' of the GDR, where he was not only a captive but also protected from external dangers, Becker is in danger of losing his integrity in the face of these new pressures.

Hence we see Becker's understanding of literature and of his own identity as a writer becoming increasingly complex and almost paradoxical. He has constructed his identity as an author in the GDR largely through his perception of his ability to influence society around him, as he explained in interview just before he left the GDR: 'Meine Zufriedenheit ist daraus entstanden, daß ich stets das Empfinden hatte, mich einmischen zu können.' (Rumler & Schwarz 1977: 133) As his work is censored and no longer published, Becker feels his position as a writer becoming destabilised in the GDR and chooses to leave in order to preserve his ability 'sich einzumischen'. (Rumler & Schwarz 1977: 133) However, when Becker comes under external pressure to attempt to influence events, he seeks to reject this position. This disillusionment on the part of Becker becomes a key focus in *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller,* his only work to be dedicated solely to the literary process itself.

2.4 Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller

2.4.1 Der Schriftsteller aus der DDR *hat* Widerstandskämpfer zu sein

In the summer semester of 1989, just a few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Becker was invited to contribute to the illustrious *Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen.* His three lectures were published a year later under the title *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller.* As Rhys Williams notes, the lectures 'contain in essence all the theoretical reflections on literary culture which Becker had demonstrated before 1989 and was to offer in the ensuing years'. (R. Williams 1998: 86) Indeed, the lectures can be read as charting Becker's own literary progress as he examines in the first lecture the production of literature in the GDR, in the second lecture literature in the West, and then in the final lecture turns the focus to consider the future of literature in general. As suggested above, these issues are debated in broad terms and Becker does not attempt to produce a critical analysis of his own work. On the contrary, Becker sees himself as rather unqualified to undertake such a task, commenting 'ich möchte nicht vor Ihnen dastehen wie ein Vogel, der sich als Ornithologe gebärdet'. (WS: 9)

Becker's first essay here reads as a reassessment of his position as a writer in the GDR and the way in which he felt this was compromised by opposing political pressures from the state and the readership. We see a more measured, theoretical consideration of the same frustrations Becker articulated in his GDR fiction about his lack of sovereignty as a

writer there. As an author Becker was aware that he constantly had to position himself in relation to the censor, that his identity as a writer was defined in part as opposition to censorship: 'es ist ja unmöglich, die Zensur zu ignorieren, man muß sich zu ihr verhalten, so oder so, und damit beginnt ein Verhängnis'. (WS: 32) Hence Becker became disinclined to ever publicly express agreement with the SED, even in cases when they shared common goals or views. In order to avoid being suspected of conforming to the demands of the censor, Becker felt he always had to openly display resistance, a situation he described as a 'Zwangslage [...]. Es handelt sich um das Dilemma desjenigen, der eine bestimmte Tat vollbringen will, dem jemand befiehlt, genau diese Tat zu vollbringen, und der danach nie mehr beweisen kann, daß er nur das getan hat, was er ohnehin tun wollte'. (WS: 23)

However, like Christoph Hein who, as we saw earlier, considered the censor to be relatively 'eindeutig and offensichtlich' (cited in Petersell 1996), Becker claimed to find the pressures he came under from the East German readership far more insidious. 'Der Leser in der DDR wünscht sich von Büchern nichts so sehr wie ein sogenanntes Anliegen. Ihm ist Parteinahme von größter Bedeutung [...]. Struktur und Sprachwitz, Feinheit und Schliff, Schönheitssinn und Stil sind wohl wichtige Beigaben, aber eben doch nur Beigaben.' (WS: 21) In order to present this 'Anliegen' and still pass the censor, an author is forced to write between the lines. 'Der Platz zwischen den Zeilen hat für die DDR-Literatur größte Bedeutung.' (WS: 21) Such demands on writers with only cursory attention given to the aesthetic dimension of their writing inevitably led to an over-politicisation of literature and Becker claimed he would never have dared write a text that did not have an overtly political content for fear of the likely public reception of such a text: 'Jetzt hat er aufgehört zu kämpfen, jetzt ist er müde geworden, jetzt haben sie ihn kleingekriegt.' (WS: 24) Whereas Becker felt projected into the role of educator by the Party, the readership projected him into the role of dissident. 'Der Schriftsteller aus der DDR *hat* Widerstandskämpfer zu sein.' (WS: 26)

Becker felt he was walking a tightrope – desperate not to conform to the expectations around him yet aware that in a dichotomy such as this 'die eine Form der Nichtanpassung hat die andere Form der Anpassung zur Folge'. (WS: 26) By resisting the censor's pressure to write uncritical work, Becker was unconsciously or unwillingly conforming to the public's expectation of him to be a dissident. In this first essay Becker admits that many of his texts from his time in the GDR now seem 'zu aufgeregt' (WS:31) and he complains about the lack of sovereignty he held over his writing in the GDR. 'Zu

keiner Zeit ist ein Mensch so wenig souverän wie dann, wenn er das tut, was er tun muß.' (WS: 32) In addition to these retrospective doubts about his writing an element of uncertainty regarding his own integrity becomes apparent. 'Damals wäre ich über eine Unterstellung, das Vorhandensein der Zensur hätte mich beim Schreiben beeinflußt, empört gewesen, doch so sicher bin ich mir heute nicht mehr. [...] Habe ich nie, mich als Taktiker fühlend, auf Schärfe verzichtet und mir damit Unschärfe eingehandelt?' (WS: 30-31) Here Becker clearly begins to doubt his own integrity and call into question his identity as a writer. He sees the situation as having had only a negative impact on his work. 'Wo immer die Verantwortung liegt: Die Situation hat mich zu einem schlechteren Schriftsteller werden lassen, als es nötig gewesen wäre.' (WS: 31)

This uncertainty and identity crisis, argues Andrea Jäger, is typical of authors who became disillusioned with 'die Verteidigung des literarischen Selbstverständnisses' as an integral part of their writing. East German authors were able to draw confidence from the knowledge that the public supported them in their struggles against the censor. When writers realised this identification between reader and author was simply 'Selbsttäuschung', it had severe consequences for their identities as writers: 'Das Eingeständnis, daß es eine Illusion war zu glauben, es hätte in der DDR so etwas wie eine gültige Allgemeinverbindlichkeit der literarischen Utopien gegeben, zieht nicht nur dem politischen, sondern – auch und vor allem – dem literarischen Selbstbewußtsein den Boden unter den Füßen weg.' (Jäger 1991: 147)

Jäger's argument is supported here by Becker's 1990 essay 'Die Wiedervereinigung der deutschen Literatur'. The focus is firmly on the adaptations East German literature will have to make in a new unified Germany. While literature in the GDR suffered from an exaggerated importance, Becker writes, it did at least maintain the belief that it was a vital element of social discourse. The very fact that literature had to constantly battle against the censor meant that it represented a fight for freedom of expression and social justice, but now the censor is gone. How should East German literature position itself in the new social order, Becker asks? The censor did at least provide some kind of 'Orientierungshilfe' (EG: 126) for authors. 'Ist am Ende, wie makaber das auch klingt, Trauer um die Zensur angebracht?' (EG: 127) This final question is left open-ended, but should not be read as a serious consideration of Becker's. Rather he is anticipating for East German authors the 'Identitätskrise' refered to by Jäger (1991: 147) which he had experienced over a decade earlier in the GDR: 'Es mag Selbsttäuschung

gewesen sein, wenn sie bisher glaubten, mit ihren Texten Einfluß auf gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen nehmen zu können; noch absurder aber ist die Hoffnung, daß ihnen dies in Zukunft möglich sein wird, da alles um sie herum Westen wird.' (EG: 132)

2.4.2 Eine Art Schriftstellertod

In his second essay of *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller* Becker expresses his disappointment on finding that, having moved to West Germany primarily in order to escape pressures exerted on him in the GDR, he came under new pressure there to be critical of the East. Although Becker later claimed he had always known 'daß der Versuch, ein "normaler West-Autor" zu werden, scheitern würde' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 119), the bitter tone of parts of this second essay suggest that here also Becker had once again become disillusioned where he had previously been optimistic. Even after living in West Germany for twelve years, Becker had no sense of belonging there. 'Immer noch komme ich mir wie ein Besucher vor.'[36] (WS: 37) Whereas in the East Becker had been projected into the dichotomous roles of educator, or social conscience, and dissident, he was given the identity of exiled intellectual in the West:

> Noch heute [...] spüre ich deutlich, welch ein Verhalten von mir erwartet wird und welch ein Verhalten Befremden auslöst. Wenn ich zum Bespiel Grund sehe, mich über Vorgänge in der DDR aufzuregen, entspreche ich der Erwartung und bestimmt wird mir ein Mikrophon hingehalten; wenn ich über hiesige Zustände herziehen will, wird es gewöhnlich eingepackt. (WS: 37-8)

Indeed, Becker found it very difficult to position himself as a writer within the emerging literary discourse when he arrived in West Germany. After the radical politicisation of literature in the 1960s, the 1970s saw the beginning of a *Tendenzwende* in literary trends as many authors began to reject the notion of writing having a political function in favour of more subjective literary preoccupations. There were, of course, many continuities with the political writing of the previous decade, particularly for authors born around 1930, such as Günter Grass or Alexander Kluge, whose understanding of literature, David Roberts (1989: xii) argues, 'is profoundly interconnected with the duty of "Bewältigung der Vergangenheit"', and for whom 'the moral, political and didactic

[36] See section 3.3 for a discussion of the problems Becker experienced trying to integrate into West German society.

function of literature is the condition of their activity. It involves a view of the writer as critic, preceptor and conscience of the (divided) nation'.

While many authors of the older generation accepted this role of 'conscience of the nation' as a self-evident part of being a writer, others at this time were beginning to reject politics and display a tendency towards a 'neue Subjektivität' in their work. For Wilfried van der Will (1989: 8) this shift begins clearly with the demise of Gruppe 47 in 1967 symbolising the end of the literary elite's influence on politics. 'With the radicalisation of the students and the establishment of the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition, the intellectuals of the Gruppe 47 lost their unique position as ideologically non-conformist critics.' Moreover, the subsequent failure of the Student Movement to realise the idealistic dream of the revolutionary revitalisation of society resulted in disillusionment and abandonment of this dream for many. 'The sobering process of revision demanded of the '68 generation led to a painful but also liberating search for identity and self-definition in the 1970s, whose driving force has frequently been described as the appeal to personal experience, as the cult of authenticity.' (Roberts 1989: xiii)

Authors such as Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Peter Handke had been asserting this division between literature and politics even during the highly politicised era of the 1960s. According to McGowan, Enzensberger insisted in his 1968 essay 'Gemeinplätze, die neuste Literatur betreffend', that 'political reality is not "ein literarisches Phänomen" and cannot therefore be effectively changed "mit literarischen Mitteln". Neither when produced by a writer nor when consumed by a reader are *literary* statements of political criticism or commitment necessarily politically meaningful acts'. Thus it follows that 'precisely because literature is no substitute for political action, to attack it for its political impotence when your real target should be the political system it has proved powerless to change is equally pointless.' (cited in McGowan 1989: 59) McGowan shows too how such pleas for the separation of literature and politics echo Peter Handke's claim in 1966: 'Eine engagierte Literatur gibt es nicht. Der Begriff ist ein Widerspruch in sich, [...] der engagierte Schriftsteller kann sich nicht engagieren.' (cited in McGowan 1989: 59)

Hence the emerging literary discourse of the early 1980s was strongly apolitical and thus fundamentally at odds with Becker's *Selbstverständnis* of what it meant to be a writer, a trend that was set to continue throughout the 1980s. The new generation of younger authors replacing Böll and his contemporaries was rejecting the notion of a politically engaged literature and refusing to contribute to the apocalyptic literary discourse

of the older authors. In his 1983 novel *Phantasien der Wiederholung* Peter Handke argued, as Bullivant (1994: 49) shows, 'that it was a "clear sign that someone isn't an artist if he takes part in the chatter about the end of the world"' and Handke's consequent novel, *Die Wiederholung* (1987), was conceived 'as a counter-weight to such chatter, as an evocation of a world illuminated by the eternal light of the act of narration'. In their introduction to *Literaturmagazin 19*, an issue dedicated solely to this de-politicisation of literature, the editors Martin Lüdke and Delf Schmidt (1987: 17) note this 'Generationswechsel' in German literature:

> Die Autoren, die den Faschismus in der (inneren und äußeren) Emigration am eigenen Leibe erfahren haben, die dann beteiligt waren an dem Versuch, eine demokratische Gesellschaftsform aufzubauen, sind heute verstummt oder gestorben. Ihre Nachfolger, die Generation der Enzensberger, Lettau oder Walser, ist, wie es scheint, in den republikanischen Ruhestand getreten. Die Kraft dieser radikaldemokratischen und republikanischen Vorstellungen scheint zu schwinden.

In his essay here Becker maintains that the reluctance on the part of western society to listen to his views is due not only to his status as an outsider, but also to what he perceives as a general disinterest in social issues and problems in the West and this second essay is primarily concerned with the 'Meinungslosigkeit' of West German literature. (WS: 58) For Becker, the rule in the West is that 'Widerspruch wird bestraft, Anpassung belohnt'. (WS: 43) He sees West German literature as conforming wholly to market forces, denying authors sovereignty in the same way as censorship does in the GDR. 'Autoren müssen sich hüten, ungeachtet der Tatsache, daß dieses Sich-Hüten-Müssen eine Art Schriftstellertod ist.' (WS: 43)

It would appear that as he fails to integrate into or be accepted by West German society, so too Becker fails to find a position within new social discourses. As late as 1988 Becker still described his residence in the West as a 'Provisorium' (Birnbaum 1997: 92) and this dual, fluctuating literary identity is the source of much confusion for Becker, as he is torn between a commitment to educating the readership in the GDR context and the newly emerging post-modern aesthetics of the West. On the one hand, Becker still adheres to the GDR concept of the writer as a social conscience, as exerting influence on society, even able to bring about societal change, yet on the other hand he rejects the notion that writers should be projected into any role, suggesting they should rather write for the pure joy of writing or as a form of self-expression. This sense of dislocation is reflected clearly

in Becker's fictional work produced after he moved to the West, all of which is either set in the East or is deliberately ambiguous in setting. Becker was aware of this trend, as he explained in his speech at the Dublin International Writers Festival' in September 1993: 'Das kommt mir selbst merkwürdig vor, wie ein Fall für den Psychiater, und Sie können sicher sein, daß ich mich bemüht habe, etwas dagegen zu tun. Aber alle meine Versuche, die neue, fremde Heimat zum Gegenstand eines Buches zu machen, sind gescheitert.' (EG: 173)

Amongst many other writers who shared this stance was Erich Loest. 'Man schreibe, so hat Loest einmal mitgeteilt, über das, was man bis zum 40. Lebensjahr erlebt habe. Es sei schwierig, danach neue Erfahrungen von Belang zu machen.' (Emmerich 1996: 428) Of course, authors who left the GDR were no longer able to experience the new events there first hand, so that they would eventually become distanced from their traditional subject material without feeling they had access to a new source. In a similar way to Becker, Jürgen Fuchs continued to believe '"daß Literatur erreicht und verändert, dort wo Lüge, Zwang und Druck vorhanden sind."' As a result he too continued to feel an outsider in the depoliticised West German literary discourse, perceiving himself 'als "Ost-West-Autor" im "Niemandsland."' (cited in Emmerich 1996: 424) Hans-Joachim Schädlich, who like Becker and Fuchs left the GDR in 1977, admitted he found the move from East to West difficult and suffered a five-year writing block following the move. (Bond 1996: 85)

The confusion Becker felt with regard to his writer identity in the West is clearly visible from the outset. His first novel written there, *Aller Welt Freund*,[37] has no clearly defined spatial setting and features a protagonist, Kilian, who would rather kill himself than face the daily horrors he encounters in his job as a news correspondent. As a further reflection of Becker's own insecurity, he explained in a 1983 interview that after *Aller Welt Freund* he planned to write a novel about an author who loses his memory and with it his ability to write, although no such novel ever appeared. In contrast to his feeling when working on *Jakob*, that it would be a 'Verlust für die Menschheit' if he didn't write the novel (EG: 148), Becker now admits that he is 'als Schriftsteller immer unsicherer geworden' and clearly very little of his earlier sense of purpose as a writer remains: 'Ist es nicht eine Zumutung, daß andere lesen sollen was ich schreibe?' (Schwarzenau 1983: 12) Becker concludes his second essay here with a consideration of whether literature can be

[37] This will be discussed in further detail in section 3.3.3

effective in shaping the discourse around it, and it is clear that his self identity as a writer remains full of contradictions: 'In dem einen Augenblick kommen mir alle Versuche, Einsichten zu fördern sinnlos vor, im nächsten scheint mir alles davon abzuhängen.' (WS: 59)

2.4.3 Die Bewahrung der Identität

So if the second essay expresses the confusion and isolation Becker experienced as an author in the West, he tackles these problems head on in the final essay in the volume, which takes the form of a 'platonic dialogue' between two friends. (R. Williams 1998: 89) A debate is triggered between the two by the narrator's friend, having decided it is high time to remove the 'Heiligenschein' (WS: 67) bestowed upon literature by some people, moving his books into the cellar in order to leave his shelves free to display his collection of glass ornaments. The narrator, an author, is horrified at this lapse of his friend into a 'Wegwerfpsychose' (WS: 69) and for the first time realises, 'daß das Lesen kein den Menschen angeborenes Bedürfnis ist'. (WS: 73) The narrator criticises the public disinterest in literature, seeing it as a result of general indifference towards social problems, whereas his friend finds that in order to command more respect authors should write books worthy of being read instead of 'dieses nichtssagende Zeug'. (WS: 76) The debate at hand 'is between two mutually exclusive positions to both of which Becker is attracted and yet the deficiencies of which he can also appreciate'. (R. Williams 1998: 91)

Once again the concept of sovereignty is, for Becker, key to the survival of literature and those who produce it. 'Literatur könne nicht überleben, indem sie genau das aufgebe, was ihr Wesen ausmache, es gebe kein Überleben durch Selbstaufgabe,' (WS: 82) argues the friend. 'Überleben habe etwas mit Bewahrung der Identität zu tun.' (WS: 83) Hence, the corruption of a text by external forces or an author's readiness to conform to these external pressures will result in a text which is unworthy of the name of literature and produced by someone who does not earn the title of writer (WS: 83). Rhys Williams' analysis of the text shows that Becker's notion of literature is itself paradoxical:

> The ideal writer envisaged in the text, at least by implication, is oppositional in that he throws into doubt prevailing certainties by offering a highly personal vision, but one who is not narrowly didactic; a writer whose precision and complexity challenge the reader, rather than merely entertain him; a writer who confronts fundamental social

issues of his time, but without offering easy solutions. (R. Williams 1998: 92)

Williams claims further here that by building seemingly stable arguments only to then undermine them, by challenging the reader and his pre-conceptions, Becker is fulfilling the paradoxes above. Yet it seems plausible here to counter that in exploring the two mutually exclusive positions, Becker is in fact attempting to reposition himself within German literary discourse. The first lecture essentially dismisses the possibility that Becker could return to write in the GDR as he refuses to compromise his integrity as a writer. The second lecture is a scathing attack on the market-oriented literary conditions in the West and simultaneously an expression of Becker's own disorientation in the post-*Tendenzwende* literary discourse there. Hence in the third lecture Becker attempts to renegotiate his understanding of his function and the limitations with which he constructs his identity as a writer. The 'Bewahrung der Identität' refers as much to Becker himself here as it does to the future of literature.

In *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller* Becker still claimed that the most important motivation for writing was 'das Bedürfnis nach Stellungnahme [...], also nach Widerspruch'. (WS: 13) In his acceptance speech for the *Hans-Fallada-Preis* in December 1990, Becker suggested that he considered the confidence he had felt as a young author in his ability to influence the discourse around him to be an essential part of writing: 'ich [halte] eine solche, an Hochmut grenzende Art von Selbstüberschätzung für ein unverzichtbares Handwerkszeug der Schriftsteller'. (EG: 148) However, Becker is finding this belief increasingly difficult to maintain. 'Ja, ich bringe es kaum mehr fertig, was ich tue, auch nur für wichtig zu halten.' (EG: 152) Indeed, the author who still seeks to engage politically is now a pitiful figure employed in pointless activity. 'Der Autor, der immer noch Teilnehmer an gesellschaftlichen Vorgängen zu sein versucht, wirkt anachronistisch und bemitleidenswert, seine Texte haben den Geruch des Hinterwäldlers; offenbar ist er unfähig zu begreifen, daß sein Einsatz weder aussichtsreich ist, noch jemanden interessiert.' (EG: 153) It was this disillusionment that had led Becker to write scripts for the television series *Liebling Kreuzberg*: 'Ich suchte ja nach einer Beschäftigung, für die ich keine Zuversicht brauchte [...]. Ich schrieb eine Folge nach der anderen, einfach weil ich es konnte.' (EG: 154) While Becker is dismissive in hindsight of the scripts he wrote for *Liebling Kreuzberg*, they still represent an important dimension of his work as a writer. In addition to securing Becker's financial future, the series also ensured his public figure status in the West, which we saw earlier was fundamental to his self identity as a writer.

Nevertheless, such comments suggest a severe disillusionment with his ability to influence the discourse around him and thus a bleak outlook for Becker's future as a writer, especially when we consider that it was in order 'mich einmischen zu können' (Rumler & Schwarz 1977: 133) that Becker moved West at all. However, in what Becker refers to as 'vielleicht meine letzte Schriftstellergewohnheit', he began to experience a desire for 'Arbeit, die mich mehr erschöpfte'. (EG: 154) Indeed, the transition Becker describes from producing the television scripts to beginning work on *Amanda herzlos* is reminiscent of the difference between Gregor Bienek in *Irreführung* and Simrock in *Schlaflose Tage*, whose efforts 'bis an seine Grenze vorzudringen' (ST: 28) allow him to maintain his integrity and achieve personal fulfilment: 'Schreiben wird erst in der Nähe einer Grenze zum Abenteuer - am besten der eigenen. Auch wenn es mir nie gelingen wird, dorthin vorzudringen, so war ich mir auf einmal doch sicher, daß diese Grenze weit außerhalb einer Anwaltspraxis in Kreuzberg lag.' (EG: 155) This is reminiscent of the confidence and independence Becker expressed as a young author where he claimed an important motivation for writing was to achieve a sense of 'Selbstverwirklichung'. (Lübbe 1974: 525)

Hence Becker appears to have overcome the crisis of identity he faced as an author during the 1980s. He claims to have rejected the notion of a writer having an educational function in society and is instead embracing a more post-modernist concept of writing as self-expression and self-exploration, something which is clearly present in *Amanda herzlos*. However, Becker no sooner establishes this apolitical position than he turns it on its head in the closing sentence of his speech: 'Ich danke Ihnen sehr für diesen Preis, er ist mir wie ein Rückenwind und spornt mich an, noch einmal über diese Sache mit der Zuversicht nachzudenken.' (EG: 155) Becker's notion of his identity as a writer has thus remained paradoxical, yet the playful way in which he explores this suggests he now enjoys these contradictions and sees them as an integral part of his identity.

2.5 Amanda herzlos

2.5.1 Hier weigert sich jemand resolut, die Rolle zu spielen, die von ihm erwartet wird

If *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller* can be read as Becker's attempt at theorising his identity as a writer, then in *Amanda herzlos* we see a fictionalised presentation of the same issue. Yet while Becker's essays address literature and its production in both East and West

Germany as well as considering the future of literature, *Amanda* offers a purely retrospective view and concentrates mainly on writing in the East. In addition here to Becker's inability to write about the West, there is possibly also a need to come to terms with his past as a GDR citizen and the country's demise.[38] What is unique about *Amanda herzlos* is that it is the first and only one of Becker's novels to feature a female protagonist. This was not a matter of chance, rather the result of Sabine Gölz's 1987 essay 'Where did the Wife go? Jurek Becker's "Parkverbot"'. Gölz's essay points out how under-developed the female roles in Becker's works are – in 'Das Parkverbot' the wife leaves her husband in the car at the beginning of the story and never even returns. Becker was annoyed here at the realisation that it hadn't even occurred to him that the wife could be the one to stay in the car while the husband left. Thus an important and very personal motive for him in writing *Amanda herzlos* was the desire 'einen Roman oder überhaupt etwas zu schreiben, worin die Hauptperson eine Frau ist. Das Netz, das ich mir zur Sicherheit geknüpft habe, ist, daß es Männer sind, die von dieser Frau erzählen und nicht sie selbst.' (Traub & Becker 1992: 104)

So while, as the title suggests, the novel's protagonist is a woman, Amanda does not narrate her own story, rather it is told by three men in succession, each one in turn her lover and all of them writers or reporters. Amanda herself is a freelance journalist and would-be novelist, yet as her articles are so uncompromisingly critical of the state, she is rarely published. As her reputation as a trouble-maker spreads, she finds it increasingly difficult to sell her articles, let alone find a position on a paper as a journalist. The first narrator, the adulterous opportunist, Ludwig Weniger, has no such trouble, as in his job as a sports journalist he is prepared to write whatever he deems necessary to earn the praise of his superiors. Ludwig tells of his stormy three-year marriage with Amanda and of their imminent divorce. As he narrates Ludwig tries to win the reader over to his point of view, namely that he is innocent in the collapse of their relationship (as he thinks Amanda knows nothing of his affairs, that cannot be a factor in the separation, he reasons) and that Amanda is now being unreasonably greedy in wanting more than her fair share of their possessions. In fact, as long as she wins custody of their son Sebastian, Amanda is willing to leave the marriage with nothing, and the more of his argument Ludwig presents, the more repellent he becomes to the reader.

[38] See section 3.4.3 for a discussion of this point.

Amanda leaves Ludwig for Fritz Hetmann, who is described by Ludwig as 'einer jener Schriftsteller, die aus ihrer Feindseligkeit gegenüber unserem Staat einen Beruf gemacht haben'. (AH: 98) Their relationship is plagued by Fritz's paranoia at his being many years older than Amanda and a professional tension exists between the two, as neither thinks much of the other's writing, although Fritz feels his success as an author gives him more authority in such areas than Amanda. Part of Fritz's narrative is presented in the form of a novella he has written about himself and Amanda (Rudolf and Louise in his fictionalised account). The end of their relationship is signalled by a row over Fritz's writing and Amanda leaves him for the third narrator, Stanislaus Doll, a West German radio correspondent based in East Berlin. For a while it seems they have achieved happiness, Amanda even begins writing Stanislaus' reports for him, her first success as a writer, until the chief of the radio station decides to replace Stanislaus, who is perceived as having socialist sympathies, with someone more supportive of the centre-right government. Stanislaus and Amanda decide to marry so that she can move West with him and after an incredibly tense few months of waiting and resisting all manner of political and emotional pressures, Amanda receives an exit visa. Stanislaus' section is narrated in diary form and it ends on 3 January 1989, with Amanda packing boxes, preparing for the imminent arrival of the removal vans which will transport her to Hamburg. This significant ending of the novel just months before the collapse of the Berlin Wall takes on added poignancy as Amanda reassures Sebastian that they will move back if he is unhappy in the West: 'Wir geben uns ein halbes Jahr, und wenn du danach zurück willst, dann ziehen wir wieder zurück.' (AH: 384)

This very deliberate cut-off date of January 1989 is one possible reason for some of the negative response the novel received. Although *Amanda herzlos* was a huge commercial success and greatly enjoyed by the public, it received rather negative reviews from critics. Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1992: V), usually a reliable advocate of Becker's writing, dismissed the novel as 'Trivialliteratur' and Peter Henning's (1992: 3) review for the *Rheinischer Merkur* declared: 'Nein, ein Meisterwerk ist er nicht geworden.' It is likely that Becker, who had thus far never managed to set his prose in the West, was unsure of how he should proceed if he were to take his novel into the new, and for him westernised, Germany. However, in looking for Becker's reasons for ending the novel at this point, we must concur with Irene Heidelberger-Leonard's claim that Becker's refusal to produce the *Wenderoman* expected of an author with his history is a deliberate decision. 'Hier weigert

sich jemand resolut, die Rolle zu spielen, die von ihm erwartet wird.' (Heidelberger-Leonard 1997: 302)

This claim is further supported by Becker's notable refusal to participate in the *Literaturstreit* which followed the publication in June 1990 of Christa Wolf's novel *Was bliebt*. The novel narrates a single day in the life of an author who is under surveillance by the *Stasi* and who bears unmistakable biographical parallels to Wolf herself. The text is a harrowing depiction of the psychological harm suffered by the objects of such surveillance. Following the novel's publication, Wolf immediately came under attack from western critics such as Ulrich Greiner writing for *Die Zeit* and Frank Schirrmacher of the *FAZ* who read the novel as Wolf's attempt at portraying herself as a victim of the regime she had previously supported. More sympathetic readings of *Was bleibt* have chosen to interpret it as a self-critical novel from Wolf, as an admission of shame and regret at her former conformity and an exploration of why she was not strong enough to express dissent and resist compromise more openly as some other writers were able to do.[39] Although other authors such as Stephan Hermlin were implicated in the criticisms, Wolf remained initially at the centre of the accusations, charged with not having done enough to resist or voice dissent against the corrupt SED regime during its lifetime and now for reasons of political expediency seeking to portray herself as a victim or political opponent of this regime. Wolf was further vilified for her perceived cowardice as it emerged that she had actually completed the novel in 1979 but then waited a decade until the SED was on the brink of collapse before she attempted to publish it.

Amongst former GDR authors to support this position of the western media in the debate was Hans Noll, who had left the East in 1984 and previously criticised Wolf for what he perceived as her indefensible conformity to a corrupt regime. 'Die große Lebenslüge der Christa Wolf besteht darin, daß sie sich einem politischen System zur Verfügung stellte, dessen Amoralität ihr bewußt ist.' (cited in Emmerich 1996: 464) Other GDR writers who shared this stance tended to broaden the focus of their criticism rather than targeting Wolf specifically. Reiner Kunze, who had left the GDR in the wake of the Biermann affair in 1977 felt that these accusations could be levied at the majority of those who had remained in the GDR: 'Die meisten von denen, die geblieben sind, haben uns durch ihr Verschweigen ständig von neuem ausgebürgert.' (cited in Anz 1991: 12) Wolf Biermann similarly supported Schirrmacher and Greiner and their articles which had

[39] See, for example, Thomas Anz (1991: 23-25)

brought the debate to the fore: 'Diese Artikel sind weder Hetze, noch blasen sie zu einer Hatz', Biermann argued. '[Sie] haben einen Streit angefacht, der fällig ist.' (cited in Anz 1991: 13)

Not all ex-GDR writers who had been victims of the SED regime joined the criticism of Christa Wolf, however. Walter Janka, who had been sentenced to imprisonment in the GDR for alleged counter-revolutionary activities in the 1950s, protested vehemently against the attacks on Wolf. Martin Ahrends, who was born in 1951 and left the GDR in 1984, attributed Wolf's relatively mild expressions of dissent against the SED to a wider generational problem. For Ahrends, those writers of the older generation who had memories of the war continued to view the GDR through the lens of these experiences and thus subscribed to the view that they were indeed working towards building a better Germany, albeit one with its own imperfections. Younger authors who had initially believed in the state ideology but then become disillusioned by it, found it easier to detach themselves from the state. The lyricist Uwe Kolbe, slightly younger than Ahrends, also recognised this generational difference and claimed that for his generation, '"die Vorstellung, daß man gemeinsam an einem neuen historischen Gebäude arbeite, das, habe es auch seine Mängel und Schwierigkeiten, doch das bessere Deutschland" sei, nicht mehr existierte'. (cited in Anz 1991: 14) Wolf also found support from some writers in the West. 'Einige westliche Intellektuelle, wie Günter Grass und Walter Jens, bestreiten westlichen Kritikern das Recht, sich in die Vergangenheitsbewältigung der ehemaligen DDR einzumischen.' (Anz 1991: 8)

With the key issues of guilt, responsibility and representing one's past in a more favourable light, the *Literaturstreit* in many ways echoed the debates which had taken place in the West after the Third Reich. When Ulrich Greiner coined the phrase *Gesinnungsästhetik* some months after the debate began to derogatively describe literature that sought to politically engage in society and which was thus, in Greiner's view, aesthetically flawed, the focus of the debate was widened to explore the political role of the intellectual and the relationship between moral and aesthetic integrity. Now the *Literaturstreit* was exploring the same issues which had been debated during the *Tendenzwende* of the previous decades and as such was reassessing German literature of the whole post-war period.

Becker, however, chose quite deliberately to remain out of the debate. As his identities as a former GDR citizen and as a socialist were thrown into turmoil by the events

surrounding German unification,[40] so Becker acknowledged experiencing unprecedented levels of confusion. Despite the term *Literaturstreit*, Becker saw this as 'eine eminent politische Auseinandersetzung' (Traub & Becker 1992: 106) and admitted 'eine gewisse Scham, auf einmal als ein ganz anderer dazustehen, viel rigoroser als der, der ich einmal gewesen bin, hat mir Zurückhaltung auferlegt'. (Traub & Becker 1992: 107) Hence we can see that Becker's self identity as a writer has clearly shifted from his earlier notion of having an educational or political role to play in society. Unlike the majority of authors who had remained in the GDR and continued to believe in an identification with the readership there that allowed them to influence their surroundings, Becker does not experience a cesura with regard to his writer identity with the demise of the GDR. In relation to the *Literaturstreit*, he refuses to engage in the narrow debate surrounding Christa Wolf as he regards this as a political debate, involvement in which would have implications for his sovereignty and social identity as a writer. His comments above also suggest he wants to avoid potential charges of retrospectively reconstructing his past in order to portray himself in a more critical light. In terms of the broader debate examining the role of literature and authors, we saw in the last section that Becker had resolved many of these issues by the end of the 1980s in his essayistic work. Rather than writing in reaction to a political event, Becker is now writing for personal reasons. 'Schreiben sollte ein Vorgang sein, sich dem Unbewußten anzunähern.' (Traub & Becker 1992: 105) In *Amanda* Becker continues the playful exploration of the many different facets of his identity as a writer which we saw in *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller*. His refusal to extend the action of his novel into a unified Germany is simultaneously a rejection of the role of social commentator Becker felt he was projected into as a writer with experience of both Germanies.

2.5.2 Wenn ich mich über die staatliche Zensur hinwegsetze, dann über die durch Amanda bestimmt

Amanda herzlos can be read as Becker's attempt at a fictional reworking of his own experiences as a writer in the GDR, the three narrators representing different stages of his literary career. Hence it is possible that the character of Ludwig Weniger suggests self-criticism from Becker for his readiness early on in his career to write tactically to get his

[40] See sections 3.4.2 and 4.5.2 respectively for discussions of the crises of identity Becker faced at this point.

work into print (an echo of *Irreführung der Behörden*?)[41] However, of the narrators, it is Fritz Hetmann with whom the autobiographical parallels are the most apparent, something Becker admitted himself. (Traub & Becker 1992: 109) In much the same way that Becker complained that in the GDR he was projected into the role of dissident novelist against his will, Hetmann similarly finds he adopts this identity unconsciously. As a young writer Hetmann made changes to a novel at the request of his publisher. 'Später ärgerte er sich über seine Nachgiebigkeit, auch nachdem das Buch ein Erfolg geworden war, er wurde das Gefühl nicht los, daß darin blinde Stellen waren.' (AH: 168) Hetmann steadfastly refuses changes suggested to a future novel and, knowing it will be rejected in its original form, posts it to a West German publisher. 'Von dem Augenblick an, da ich den Umschlag in einen Briefkasten gesteckt hatte, war ich Dissident.' (AH: 169) This is not a conscious move on the part of Hetmann, he only realises how serious the situation is when he is called to a meeting at the *Schriftstellerverband* where three men question him. 'Jeder war der andere, zusammen waren sie die Gegenseite.' (AH: 171) For Holger Helbig (1998: 64) this is a weak point of the novel, that Becker could imbue his character with so much 'unrealistische Naivität' as to believe a package the size and shape of a manuscript addressed to a West German publisher would make it over the border. However, I suggest that this is more likely to be intentional on the part of Becker here as he aims to show that Fritz is not politically motivated, rather first and foremost he is driven by the very personal desire to see his work published and it is this innocent wish rather than outspoken political criticism that causes him to be perceived as a dissident and enemy of the state.

The pressure Fritz comes under to live up to this role is nowhere more apparent than when Amanda asks him to give a reading from his new novel at her church group. Becker had occasionally read from his works at church meetings himself. After an argument with Amanda about his novel, Fritz chooses to read a passage she did not disapprove of, one with no discernable political content. The audience listens politely but seems puzzled. 'Es war klar, daß die meisten sich eine andere Lesung versprochen hatten, daß sie genau das vermißten, was [Fritz] ausgesondert hatte.' (AH: 231) One member of the audience expresses her confusion: Everyone knows Fritz has written more critical work than this, 'schließlich seien deswegen seine Bücher verboten worden; die meisten Besucher seien gekommen, um genau die zu hören und darüber zu diskutieren'. (AH: 232) Although

[41] This was discussed in detail in sections 2.2.4 and 2.3.1

Fritz was ostensibly invited to the meeting because of his fame as a writer, the public there have no interest in his literary talents, they only want to hear his political commentary.

Fritz has internalised these demands from the public to the point where the political content of his writing becomes its dominant feature. Fritz/Rudolf asks Amanda/Louise for her opinion of his latest novel:

> Wenn es die Zensur nicht gäbe, so begann sie, wäre das Buch anders geworden. [...] Sie meine aber nicht, er habe darauf geachtet, [des Zensors] Wünsche zu erfüllen, vielmehr sei es ihm darum gegangen, keinen Zweifel an seiner unnachgiebigen Haltung aufkommen zu lassen. Er habe auf eine Weise geschrieben, daß dem armen Zensor gar keine andere Wahl bleibe, als zu verbieten, er habe ihm keinen Ausweg gelassen. Nichts sei dem Autor wichtiger gewesen. (AH: 212-13)

Unlike Ludwig, whose capacity for conformity towards the State is 'grenzenlos' (Helbig 1998: 61), Fritz finds he has conformed instead to the role of dissident projected on to him. Indeed, he concedes that Amanda's criticism is justified but after two days of reading through his manuscript trying to find a way to rectify it, Fritz is forced to admit that the book is so fundamentally flawed that he would have to start it again if he were to heed Amanda's advice. Instead he promises to bear her comments in mind for his next work. It seems that Ludwig's initial assessment of Fritz, that he is somebody who has made a profession from his 'Feindseligkeit gegenüber unserem Staat' (AH: 98), may be correct. Fritz's brother, the real Rudolf for whom the protagonist of Fritz's novella is named, escaped to the West as a young man and has amassed a considerable amount of wealth and power there. When Fritz has a novel rejected for the first time on political grounds, Rudolf offers to arrange for him to move quickly and painlessly to the West. Fritz considers this proposition, but decides to stay in the East: 'mir sei ein kompliziertes Leben in einiger Bedeutsamkeit lieber als ein sorgenfreies im Vergessenwerden'. (AH: 221) Indeed, it seems Fritz soon forgets Amanda's advice and continues to write with one eye on the censor. When he suspects Sebastian (under instruction from Amanda) of erasing his novella from the computer, Fritz sees this as a form of censorship. 'Wenn ich mich über die staatliche Zensur hinwegsetze, dann über die durch Amanda bestimmt.' (AH: 115)

2.5.3 Revis(it)ing the Past

If Fritz's identity as a writer is portrayed as being constructed wholly by the existence of the censor, then the narrative structure of *Amanda herzlos* also provides a perfect literary example of post-modern identity construction through and within discourse, as the reader gains a multi-faceted picture of the central, voiceless character. Each man's account of Amanda is subjective and, in the case of the first two, coloured by the experience of the breakdown of their relationships with Amanda. The aptly named Ludwig Weniger's picture of Amanda as cold-hearted, greedy and idle (he believes Amanda writes critical articles deliberately knowing nobody will employ her, in order to avoid having to work) contrasts with those of the other two men, which in turn are inconsistent with each other. Adding to the complexity of the figure of Amanda is Fritz's narrative, which shifts constantly back and forth between his own 'true' story with Amanda and his fictionalised version from the novella about Rudolf and Louise. One event in the novel, when Fritz visits Amanda in the flat she shares with Ludwig, is narrated three times: firstly by Ludwig, then by Fritz, then again in his novella when Rudolf visits Louise. Each version is different from the others. As each of the men attempts to impress his own version of Amanda upon the reader, we are reminded that we are reading a subjective account. Occasional controversial episodes (did Amanda really encourage Sebastian to wipe Fritz's novella from his computer, as Fritz maintains?) prompt a desire to hear Amanda's own story and cause the reader to call the validity of the narrators' stories into question. Through the narrative structure of the novel Becker 'denies his readers any sovereign overview of the subject, encouraging them to experience reality as multi-faceted'. (Rock 2000: 131) Becker's characters have various social identities projected onto them and as each man's narrative is undermined by the next, Becker shows how fragile these identities are.

Fritz's novella forms the backdrop against which the thematic of writing is problematised. In the same way Becker is using *Amanda herzlos* as a tool for exploring his missing GDR years, Fritz is using his writing as a means of coming to terms with the end of his relationship with Amanda. 'Ich dachte, wenn meine Zeit mit Amanda nicht aus dem Fenster geworfen sein soll, müßten ein paar ordentliche Seiten daraus werden.' (AH: 114) However, as Fritz has already completed his novella once and lost it, a further layer of complexity is added. Becker is writing about an author trying to reconstruct a lost story about his own past, so we see that not only the writing thematic is the focus here, but also

specifically the thematic of writing about the past, of reconstructing the past. Fritz's narrative is hence threefold: there is his story with Amanda; the parts of his novella he can remember word for word which are printed in italics; and the parts of his story which are forgotten and which he tries to reconstruct with varying degrees of success. There is a clear element of *Wunschbild* in Fritz's writing, as episodes in his relationship with Amanda that are particularly embarrassing, difficult or unpleasant are told from within the novella. The extra layer of fiction on the one hand distances Fritz from his unhappy memories and on the other hand offers him the opportunity to rewrite his past as he wished it had happened.

Soon, however, the narratives begin to merge and it becomes less clear which events are 'true' and which are fictionalised in the novella. Comments such as 'Zuvor schon hatte es eine Auseinandersetzung gegeben, die uns alle vier betraf (Rudolf wie Amanda, Louise wie mich)' (AH: 161) and '[...] als wir im Bett lagen (wir vier)' (AH: 163) show that Fritz sees his fictionalised narrrative of the novella as inextricably linked to his real relationship with Amanda. Eventually he admits: '[Rudolfs] Dialog mit Louise und meiner mit Amanda sind inzwischen so sehr eins geworden, daß ich sie nicht mehr auseinanderhalten kann.' (AH: 162) This is reminiscent of Becker's comments in 'Die unsichtbare Stadt' where he discusses his lack of childhood memory. 'Vielleicht habe ich gedacht, wenn ich nur lange genug schreibe, werden die Erinnerungen schon kommen. Vielleicht habe ich irgendwann auch angefangen, manche meiner Erfindungen für Erinnerung zu halten.' (Becker 1990b: 25) Here Becker is not only warning those who would see his fiction as autobiographical of the unreliability of his narrative, he is also ironising the processes of reconstructing the self through narrative, a process he undertakes himself as a writer.

2.5.4 Eine unnatürliche Person, die immer eine Rolle spielen müsse

While critics and even Becker himself have been quick to point out the similarities between Becker and his male narrators in the novel, especially Fritz as shown above, I would argue that it is in fact Amanda who is more representative of Becker and his writing career, a claim which is supported by the subheadings of each section. The first section narrated by Ludwig Weniger is headed 'Die Scheidung', the middle section is called 'Die verlorene Geschichte' and Stanislaus Doll's final section 'Der Antrag'. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (1997: 310) reads these subheadings as 'die Teilung Deutschlands', 'der Verlust

des Sozialismus' and 'die Vereinigung von Ost (Amanda) mit West (Stanislaus)' respectively, concluding that Becker may have produced 'ein deutsch-deutsches Volksmärchen' here. Similarly, Holger Helbig claims the marriage of Amanda and Stanislaus represents 'eine vorweggenommene ost-westdeutsche Vereinigung'. (Helbig 1998: 60) However, if we consider Becker's own admission of the strong autobiographical content of his novel on both professional and personal levels – Becker's depiction of the figure Amanda included some of his own complicated relationships with women (Gilman 2002: 276) – then it seems these subheadings have more personal meanings for Becker. Is it not possible here that Amanda's relationships with the three men mirror Becker's relationships as a writer to the GDR? As a young writer, Becker was convinced the state and its ideology were fundamentally correct, yet he quickly became disillusioned (Die Scheidung?) and as he became increasingly critical of the Party he became known first and foremost as a dissident writer. This rupture was so severe that Becker decided to leave the East (Die verlorene Geschichte?) in order to protect his integrity as a writer. In looking forward to a new future in the West (Der Antrag?) Becker's dreams will not all be fulfilled, but he achieved a greater level of independence there than he did in the GDR. I suggest that we can link these three phases in Becker's writing career to Amanda's relationships with the three narrators, showing that Amanda reflects many aspects of the difficulties and triumphs of Becker's writing.

This argument is supported by the biographical picture the reader is given of Amanda. As a result of her political views, Amanda is isolated from society, unemployed, not a member of any collective, desperately seeking a space where she can fit in, a way 'raus aus der Vereinzelung.' (AH: 237). Her lovers try to project roles onto her. Ludwig, Amanda's first husband, conspires with her mother, a Party Secretary, to draw her into mainstream society. 'Es wäre die Rettung, sagte ich, wenn man sie in ein Kollektiv einordnen könnte.' (AH: 93) Similarly, Fritz attributes Amanda's isolation to her overestimating her abilities as a writer. Fritz decides he is the only person to help her overcome this disappointment and asks her to marry him. In the same way that he always fought to reject social identities imposed upon him, Becker shows here, 'daß [Amanda] immer dann verschwindet, wenn diese Männer sie als Projektion ihrer eigenen Bedürfnisse betrachten'. (Gilman 2002: 270)

Ludwig, who in his conformity to the expectations of the state expects the same from Amanda, projects the strongest pressures onto her. In words reminiscent of the

passive state from which Simrock awakens in *Schlaflose Tage* he complains about the accusations Amanda throws at him: 'daß ich nur denke, wenn es unbedingt sein muß. Daß mein Normalzustand ein Dahindämmern ist.' (AH: 25) Ludwig is synonymous with the state for Amanda, something demonstrated by the fact that he readily invites a colleague who is a known *Stasi* informer to his and Amanda's home so that this colleague can question Amanda about her contacts with a West German publisher. Within this relationship Amanda struggles to write and her articles are not published. For Ludwig's sister Amanda is 'eine unnatürliche Person, die immer irgendeine Rolle spielen müsse, weil sie die eigene noch nicht gefunden habe'. (AH: 45) With Fritz Amanda fares little better. Fritz is shown not to be a dissident in the true sense of the word. He dismisses Amanda's writing as 'literarische Hausfrauenarbeit' (AH: 113), her meetings in the church group, as 'Widerstandsplauderei, Empörungssoll, Taschen voll Faust, Dissidenten-getuschel' (AH: 194) and concentrates instead on writing forbidden literature. Amanda struggles to assert her own identity and turns down Fritz's proposal of marriage with the reasoning '[sie] wisse immer noch nicht, was aus ihr einmal werden sollte. Wenn sie ihn heirate, wäre das klar: seine Frau.' (AH: 174) After rejecting the union with conformity and with pseudo-dissidence, which is in itself another form of opportunism, Amanda then turns to Stanislaus Doll, who is the very antithesis of Ludwig Weniger, and not just in name. In time Amanda begins to write Stanislaus' reports for him, her first success as a writer. Indeed she reaches such a level of fulfilment that she begins writing fiction again.

The couple's decision to marry and move West, argues Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (1997: 309-10), is utterly implausible in that it shows a total capitulation from Amanda who has always avoided taking the route of least resistance. However, I suggest that by doing so Amanda has found a place in which she can write. In her union with Stanislaus, the West, she is no longer under any pressure to conform to conflicting sets of expectations and thus seems to achieve a level of *Selbstverwirklichung* through her work. However, this achievement is a deception in itself. Amanda is unique amongst Becker's protagonists as the only writer to fulfil his paradoxical ideal of what it means to be a writer. As a journalist she is able to engage in and influence the discourse around her and because she writes in Stanislaus' name, she is disguised, anonymous to her publisher and readers and thus distanced from social identities and expectations projected onto writers, including Stanislaus, who comes under pressure from his editor to write according to a particular

political persuasion. In the final analysis then, it is only through the assumption of a false identity that Amanda achieves independence as a writer.

2.6 Conclusion

Becker began writing, as he explained in 1990, convinced that as an author he was engaged in 'eine nützliche Arbeit'. (EG: 147) Indeed when he sat at his desk to begin work on his first novel, *Jakob der Lügner,* it was 'in der Überzeugung, daß es ein Verlust für die Menschheit wäre, wenn er es nicht täte'. (EG: 148) Looking back at this experience almost twenty-five years later, Becker recognises that the actual effect of the novel compared to his original expectations was 'fast null' (EG: 148) but still maintains that this confidence is an essential part of a writer's identity. Despite this earnest approach to his work, Becker's earliest texts, even *Jakob* with its deadly serious subject matter, belie his mischievous sense of humour and *penchant* for visual comedy which is so well suited to the medium of cabaret where he began his writing career. While he showed himself to be a critical author from the start, the criticism in this early work reflects Becker's belief in writing having an educational social function, shaping and influencing the social and political discourses which surround it.

Irreführung der Behörden, Becker's second novel, reads as a very personal exploration of the processes Becker was going through as he adopted the identity of writer in the GDR. An author's integrity or sovereignty over his work is the central issue of the book, which shows how from the beginning of his writing career Becker felt he and his texts were in danger of being compromised by the opposing pressures exerted on authors by the authorities and by the GDR readership. Nevertheless, *Irreführung* still suggests Becker felt able to continue to live and write in the GDR at this time and the thaw in cultural policy which made it possible for the novel to be published at all would have further reassured Becker of this. However, after the expatriation of Becker's friend and colleague Wolf Biermann, none of this optimism remained. The unpublished text 'Protokoll eines Gesprächs...' states quite clearly that Becker realised he could not live in the GDR as a writer and represents the decision Becker had to make as to whether to remain an author or whether to remain in the GDR. At this time Becker acknowledged that he had adopted a tactical approach in his work in order to pass the censor. He now seeks to reject this in favour of a more independent attitude towards his writing. Yet his work

produced after this decision, in particular *Schlaflose Tage*, is just as much a reaction to the censor as any earlier tactical behaviour may have been. Aesthetic and creative considerations now appear secondary to Becker's desire to express his political opinions in polemical tirades against the authorities. Hence, in his emphatic rejection of the identity of educator the state seeks to impose on him, Becker has unwillingly conformed to the expectations of the GDR readership. By moving to the West in 1977 and choosing in 1979 to extend his visa to remain there for a further decade, Becker is clearly privileging his identity as a writer above that of GDR citizen, as he seeks to regain control and sovereignty over his writing.

However, in the depoliticised literary discourse of the West, Becker experiences a crisis in his identity as a writer, something which is exacerbated by his position as an outsider there. As he continues to be projected into the role of GDR dissident in the West, Becker feels his attempts to involve himself in the social processes around him are unwelcome. Moreover, as the notion of the politically engaged writer is overwhelmingly rejected in the literary discourse of the time, Becker finds his understanding of what it means to be a writer is fundamentally challenged. He admits to experiencing increasing insecurity as a writer throughout the 1980s, something we see reflected most clearly in *Aller Welt Freund.* In *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller* Becker examines his destabilised position as a writer, firstly by returning to the conditions he faced in the East and effectively reiterating his rejection of these conditions, then by turning his attack on the market-focused literature of the West. In his final essay of the series Becker turns his attention to the future of literature and thus by implication to his own future role as an author, theorising the tensions and contradictions he has experienced between his social and self identities as a writer. Through his exploration of these problems it seems that Becker is able to reconcile himself to the complexities inherent to his writer identity and embrace its insecurities as an important part of this identity.

Becker's return from the production of television scripts to what he considered to be the more demanding medium of prose fiction in the form of *Amanda herzlos* is confirmation of this regained confidence as a writer. In 1992, the same year *Amanda* was published, Becker claimed: 'Immer wenn ich ein neues Buch anfange, und vielleicht fange ich deswegen immer seltener ein neues Buch an, komme ich mir vor, wie einer, der von vorne anfangen muß.' (Birnbaum 1997: 100) However, this should not necessarily be read as a negative admission, as it becomes clear in *Amanda* that Becker now relishes the

opportunity to explore and reinvent his literary identity. Here he embraces a post-modern aesthetic through a narrative structure that forces the reader to view reality as multilayered and subjective. Further, Becker sets himself new literary challenges in choosing a female protagonist for the first time and is able to take an ironic look at himself as a writer and at the way he set out to use literature to reinvent his past through his three male narrators. *Amanda herzlos* is also less 'aufgeregt' (WS: 31) than many of Becker's earlier works which he claimed in retrospect to dislike for their overly political stance. By refusing to continue his novel into a unified Germany and thus rejecting the expectations placed upon him as an author with experience of both Germanies, Becker maintains a very personal focus in the novel and thus asserts his independence as a writer.

Although Becker chose to remain detached from the *Literaturstreit, Amanda* indirectly addresses many issues central to this debate. Amanda's relationships to the three male narrators are in some ways representative of Becker's relationship to the GDR authorities, whereas the three men themselves can be seen as (self-critical) reconstructions by Becker of his own identity as an East German writer which allow him to explore the tensions and pressures he faced within this identity. Hence the novel carries many thematic parallels to Wolf's *Was bleibt*, publication of which brought the *Literaturstreit* to public prominence, and *Amanda herzlos* can be read as Becker's own private elaboration of these issues.

Amanda is unique amongst the writers Becker portrays in his work as she manages to fulfill his paradoxical notion of the ideal writer, albeit only by assuming a false identity, as someone who engages in and influences social discourse while remaining detached from the attendant pressures this discourse exerts on an author. However, the ability to influence the social processes around him, a key reason behind his decision to move West in the 1970s, is increasingly unimportant to Becker. In a 1995 interview he admitted he no longer subscribed to the notion of the engaged author with a moral or educational social role to play in society, but denied this was a sign of resignation on his part, rather he now sees his earlier ambitions as unrealistically naive: 'ich bin nicht resigniert. Ich schätze nur meine Möglichkeiten, Einfluß zu nehmen, realistischer ein als früher. Ist es Resignation, wenn man aufhört, größenwahnsinnig zu sein?' (EG: 232-3) Instead Becker returned to another of his early motivations for writing, that of 'Selbstverwirklichung' (Lübbe 1974: 525). In his final interview before his death Becker explained that his motivations for writing now were primarily personal: 'Am Schreiben kann ich ein kleines bißchen fliegen. [...]

Eigentlich sind [meine] Texte intelligenter, als ich es bin. [...] Das bringt mich zu dem Schluß, daß ich nicht immer, aber vielleicht manchmal am Schreibtisch etwas kann, was ich sonst nirgends kann.' (Koelbl 1997: 212)

Chapter Three – Shifting German Identities

3.1 Introduction

We have already seen that as an adult, Jurek Becker had no memory of his early childhood in the ghetto and concentration camp; his earliest memories were of life in the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany and then the GDR. Hence these early years proved immensely difficult for the young Becker as he tried to position himself in the new society and sought to be accepted by his German peers, who continued to perceive him as a Jew and a victim of the Holocaust. This identity was officially reinforced as Becker and his father were granted the status of *Opfer des Faschismus* by the state. Yet with no memory of this past nor any frame of reference through which to access it, such as other family members or a return to his former home, Becker rejected these strange and unwanted social identities. He felt that as far as his identity was concerned, he was starting out with a blank page and had to construct an identity from nothing, and for this reason he struggled to assert a self identity in the face of so many external pressures.

In many ways, the problems Becker faced with his identity during this period were also confronting the newly established GDR as it sought to create a new and positive identity wholly separate from the all too recent past. Fulbrook (1999: 19) shows how in 'the shadow of the Holocaust any notion of German national identity was uniquely problematic, uniquely tortured. [...] Germans, alone among European nations, could not even be "patriotic" without arousing hackles and fears among their neighbours'. The official propaganda of the East sought to create a positive national identity detached from this dark past, founded on the fiction that the GDR was a socialist state of innocent workers and peasants, liberated from the Nazis (who now resided exclusively in the West) by antifascists. For Fulbrook (1999: 28), this 'was *the* crucial founding myth of the GDR' and allowed a positive East German identity to be constructed through a sense of difference to the equally fascist Nazi past and West German present. However, fundamental differences were apparent from the outset between this official discourse and popular perception. The majority of GDR citizens did not view West Germany as the class enemy in such absolute terms as the official propaganda portrayed it. This propaganda was further undermined by the FRG's basic constitution, which granted immediate citizenship to any East German who left the GDR, and by the growing disparity between standards of living in East and West Germany, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

The Soviet Union had followed very different policies to the Western Allies in their respective occupation zones, not least in that they had been far more rigorous in removing Nazis from positions of authority and implementing new programmes of education for adults and children alike. In addition to the ideological differences between the Soviets and the Western Allies, divergent economic policies in the occupied zones of Germany contributed towards the ultimate transformation of Germany into a divided state. In the West the occupying powers were keen to rebuild a strong economy and industry, seeing this as prerequisite to wide public acceptance of a new democracy, while in the East the Soviets were more concerned with collecting reparations and, in contrast to the West, actively dismantled much machinery and heavy industry and moved it to Russia. Moreover, the steps towards the establishment of an East German state in the Soviet zone were not created by Soviet initiative, rather it was in 'response to, and lagging behind, developments in the west'. (Fulbrook 1992: 163) The currency reform which was introduced in the western zones in June 1948 was followed by a similar reform in the East and by an attempt to cut Berlin off from communications with the western zones in the form of the Berlin blockade. The GDR was only formally founded in October 1949, almost five months after the foundation of the FRG.[42] Indeed, the Soviets were arguably less committed to the GDR in the long term than the Western Allies were to their respective occupation zones, something which was demonstrated in 1952 by Stalin's (at first genuine) offer of a neutral, unoccupied Germany in return for the abandonment of the West German rearmament process. However, by this point the Americans and the British were concentrating on further developing a western defence plan and, like Adenauer 'who – despite compulsory lip-service to the cause of reunification – was firmly committed to a CDU-dominated, western capitalist democracy', they viewed the prospect of a unified Germany with little enthusiasm. (Fulbrook 1992: 179)

As the division of Germany became an increasingly long term prospect, the two states were faced with the task of establishing their own separate identities, or at least their distinctness from each other. For West Germany, which had the financial and political support of the Western Allies, this proved easier than for the GDR. Although both Germanys faced the problem 'of being a partial state, a severed limb of a defeated and divided nation, with a political regime in the main imposed by the will of the occupying

[42] The FRG's constitution, the *Grundgesetz,* was initially intended as a temporary measure and obliged the new state to actively pursue German unification.

powers and not representing an indigenous development from the people', (Fulbrook 1992: 299) the imposed will of the West was proving more beneficial to the people there than that in the East. At the same time as the FRG was beginning to experience the economic miracle, East Germans were seeing their standard of living decline, as GDR industry, those parts which had not been taken to Russia in reparations, failed to generate profits. The government's response to this, namely to increase production quotas for workers, succeeded only in creating mass dissent for the first time in the country's short history and 17 June 1953 saw tens of thousands of workers marching through the streets demanding, amongst other things, the abolition of the new production quotas. This Workers' Uprising was fairly quickly (and violently) crushed but only with the help of Soviet troops. The failure of the West to intervene against this Soviet violence emphasised to the GDR citizens how isolated they now were from their western counterpart. The disparity in wealth and standards of living, combined with this violent and decidedly undemocratic approach to dealing with dissent from the SED, left many in the GDR feeling rather disenchanted.

As we have already noted, this sense of difference from the West had already become the underlying principal on which the new East German identity was constructed and for a long time even after 1953 East Germans were prepared to tolerate inferior economic conditions in return for a feeling of ideological and political superiority, the feeling of being part of the 'better Germany'. While the Federal Republic's *Alleinvertretungsanspruch* insisted that it, as the only truly democratic successor to the Third Reich, had the sole right to represent the German people, the GDR's 'basic legitimation [...] was its status as the truly "anti-fascist" state'. (Fulbrook 1995: 24) This tension, this definition through difference, was to remain at the heart of the GDR's national and political identity for the four decades of its existence. The greater democracy, economic success and superior standards of living in West Germany, contributing factors in the 1953 uprising, would later become constant thorns in the East German regime's side, impossible yardsticks against which its own relative failures in these areas were measured. However, in the early post-war period such differences were tolerated or even celebrated as signifiers of the difference between East and West. In the East German view, Fulbrook claims, 'West Germany represented continuity with the Third Reich, allowing both the Nazi past and the Western present to be equally denigrated as fascist'. (Fulbrook 1995: 24)

In seeking to define an inherently political national identity as the 'better Germany', this difference was the key to the new state's claims of legitimacy.

In 1955 West Germany developed the *Hallstein-Doktrin*, which reasserted its *Alleinvertretungsanspruch* and now also announced that, with the exception of the Soviet Union, it would refuse to hold diplomatic relations with any country that recognised the legitimacy of the GDR as a German state. The intention was to undermine East Germany's claims of validity as a separate nation. Thus it became extremely difficult for any country outside the Soviet sphere of influence (with a few notable exceptions such as Yugoslavia and Cuba) to establish formal relations with the GDR, whose claims of national sovereignty were indeed challenged by the doctrine.

Although Becker spoke often in interview of the problems he experienced growing up in the GDR in trying to create an East German identity for himself, and indeed he portrays these difficulties implicitly or explicitly in much of his fiction, he rarely addresses the problems the GDR faced as a state in trying to establish this fragile national identity. When he does so, it is very tongue-in-cheek, such as in his unpublished cabaret text, 'Bundesratssitzung morgen' where Becker satirises the *Hallstein-Doktrin*.[43] This is Becker's only literary reference to the GDR's struggle to achieve recognition in its early years. Indeed, his only novel set during this time, *Der Boxer*, portrays largely apolitical characters who are concerned only with their own problems of trying to assimilate into the new society.

Such feelings of being an outsider remain a central theme of Becker's writing. There is a clear tension between his desire to assimilate on the one hand and being held at arm's length from his surroundings by both his peers and his own mistrust of all things 'German' on the other hand. In fact, it is only as a teenager, when Becker manages to eliminate the linguistic errors that previously marked him out, that others accepted him, 'wenn auch fälschlicherweise' (WS: 12) and Becker claimed to feel fully assimilated. Of course, he is only able to achieve this integration by hiding his past and deliberately constructing an insincere 'German' identity.

Nevertheless, as a result of his political convictions Becker did begin to feel a strong affinity to the GDR and began to view it as his *Heimat*. This is demonstrated not least by his decision to join the army and serve his homeland, although as a victim of

[43] This text is examined in section 4.2.3.

fascism he was exempt from national service.[44] Becker's subsequent acceptance and celebration as an author in the GDR further confirmed his identity as an East German. Although Becker later suffers disillusionment with the GDR and chooses to leave in order to be able to continue his writing, the GDR still symbolises an element of hope for him. The very existence of a socialist system, even if he disagrees with the way socialism is practised, represents hope for the future as an alternative to western capitalism. Hence we see a dialectical notion of identity from Becker with regard to his citizenship, with Germanness representing otherness, while the GDR is an (initially wholly) positive concept. For Becker, the notion of Germanness as synonymous with fascism, as instilled in him from early childhood onwards by his father, is an historical concept linked inextricably to the Third Reich. It has little to do with the GDR identity which Becker seeks to construct for himself, indeed he sees this as the very antithesis of 'German', representing a progressive, socialist path to Utopia. Furthermore, as a writer he feels able to engage in social processes and debates and clearly sees the GDR as something he can actively contribute to and that is worthy of such a personal investment.

Upon moving to West Germany in 1977, Becker was never able to recapture this feeling of belonging and remained detached from his surroundings in the FRG. Before he settled in West Berlin, Becker initially accepted various posts as a visiting professor, seizing the opportunity to gain some distance from the GDR and concentrate on his work at the same time. During this period of travel Becker was confronted with different layers of his identity as a citizen, such as in America where he was not seen as an East German or even a German, rather as a European. At the same time Becker continued to assert his intention to return to the GDR, insisting it was still his home. However, when he did return to Germany it was to West Berlin and although he continued to visit the East several times a week, he gradually began to realise that his ties to the GDR had become thinner, that the people there viewed him as a visitor from the West.

While Becker became distanced from his East German identity on the one hand, he failed to assimilate into West Germany on the other hand, where he was ironically seen for the first time as a 'true' East German. The 1983 general elections heralded the end of a decade and a half of Socialist Democratic government and the beginning of a new phase of Conservative dominance in West Germany, causing Becker to identify still less with the FRG and it was at this time that his first work to be written solely in the West, *Aller Welt*

[44] See section 4.2.1 for a discussion of Becker's early political sense of belonging in the GDR.

Freund was published. The novel, which begins with the failed suicide attempt of the protagonist, Kilian, who cannot cope with what he perceives as the miserable, slow demise of mankind, gives voice to Becker's own bewilderment at this time. Similarly, the novel's ambiguous setting reflects the lack of a sense of *Heimat* Becker felt in the West.

A key reason behind this continuing remoteness on the part of Becker is what he perceived as remnants of fascism in the West, where he complained he was made to feel like a Jew in a way he had not been in the GDR. Indeed, Becker was even unfortunate enough to directly experience expressions of anti-Semitism himself. These fascist undertones rose to the surface towards the end of the 1980s with the advent of the *Historikerstreit*, a debate amongst prominent historians and intellectuals regarding the (in)appropriateness of 'normalising' the treatment of the Third Reich and relativising German guilt. Here Becker became embroiled in a public argument with Martin Walser that once again illustrated his separateness from West Germany and here it is clear that Becker viewed the FRG as a continuation of the treacherous, historical notion of Germany he had inherited from his father. The confusion and insecurity Becker experienced in the FRG continued into reunification and beyond.

The opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 became one of the most significant political moments of the twentieth century, and it was accompanied by a great wave of euphoria as people in both Germanys and the wider international community sensed that this finally signalled the end of over four decades of Cold War. On a domestic level too the fall of the Wall represented a great triumph for those in the GDR who had organised and attended the weekly political protests over the latter half of 1989, most famously encapsulated in the chant 'Wir sind das Volk'. After more than half a century of living under some form of dictatorship, the East German people, encouraged by Gorbachev's reforming policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, were finding the courage to take to the streets and demand their civil liberties. On 4 November 1989 between 500 000 and one million people attended a demonstration on East Berlin's Alexanderplatz[45] and demanded social and political reform, more specifically in the areas of open democratic elections, freedom of speech and freedom to travel. Under mounting political pressure Erich Honecker had already resigned from his leadership of the Party,

[45] Emmerich (1996: 458) puts the figure at over half a million, while Bahrmann & Links (1999: 63) suggest the number of participants was actually closer to one million.

ostensibly on the grounds of poor health, in October, yet his replacement, Egon Krenz, was no more popular with the public than Honecker had been himself.

While the sense of confusion grew steadily within the Party, thousands of GDR citizens were leaving the country via the West German-Czech border and it was clear that new travel legislation was necessary in order to staunch the flow of those fleeing. Thus the *Politbüro* devised a travel policy whereby citizens would be able to apply for permission to leave the GDR simply for holidays or short visits without needing any special grounds. The following day, 9 November 1989, *Politbüro* member Günter Schabowski answered questions on these rapid changes at a press conference. When asked about the continuing travel restrictions Schabowski decided as an act of placation to describe the new measures which had been decided upon that day. In response to further questioning about when these new measures would come into effect he replied, rather uncertainly: 'Nach meiner Kenntnis ist das sofort, unverzüglich.' (Bahrmann & Links 1999: 72) Just minutes later West German television was reporting that the GDR had opened its borders and thousands of people flocked to the border crossings. There they met confused guards who initially refused to open the borders as they had received no such orders. However, shortly before midnight under the pressure of so many thousands of people and with media reports repeating Schabowski's words, the border guards finally capitulated and opened the gates, allowing the crowds who had gathered on both sides to flood through.

This sudden and unexpected freedom brought with it an initial sense of euphoria on the part of many German citizens who had considered the enforced partition of the nation unjust. This view was endorsed by prominent politicians such as Willy Brandt, who had been mayor of West Berlin when the Wall was built and who now famously proclaimed: 'Jetzt wächst zusammen, was zusammengehört.' (Parkes 1997: 53) Similarly, Helmut Kohl and his visions of a ten-point-plan leading to 'blühende Landschaften' for a unified Germany further perpetuated the idea that the citizens of both Germanys could look forward to a rosy future together. That this outlook was naïve and unrealistic, perhaps inevitably considering the levels of chaos and confusion from which the situation had arisen, soon became all too clear as deep-rooted divisions between the two nations caused economic and social tensions.

In the early phases of the *Wende* Becker admitted to experiencing unprecedented levels of confusion regarding his political opinions and identity, something which is clearly reflected in his literary output of this time. The demise of the GDR, and with it the end of

Becker's East German citizenship meant also the loss of hope this alternative social system had represented. While his earlier works had suggested a clear distinction between the notion of an historical Germanness as other and a positive symbol of hope in the GDR, Becker now explicitly equates the Third Reich with East Germany in an attempt to distance himself from the GDR and thus from the sense of loss its demise has caused. Yet Becker's first post-reunification novel, *Amanda herzlos*, is set in the GDR, which betrays a continuing affinity to and concern with the East. Moreover, it suggests also that Becker is still not able to set his work in the new and for him westernised Germany.

Amanda herzlos, which was to be Becker's final novel, does indeed seem to have helped him to resolve some of these tensions as his next work, the television series *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk*, is set in unified Germany and engages wholeheartedly with the social discourse surrounding the problems emerging in the aftermath of unification. Certainly it is after the initial euphoria has died down and exposed these underlying problems that Becker is able to thrive once again as a creative writer and as a citizen actively involving himself in the social processes surrounding him. Paradoxically, he is more confident in this atmosphere of confusion and bewilderment, perhaps because he now feels able to identify with the dominant social sentiments in a way that had not been possible for him during the period of euphoria. Becker is able once again to identify with East Germans and the insecurity they are experiencing as they make the transition he had undergone over a decade earlier. Indeed, as someone with extensive experience of both Germanys, Becker is able to overcome the 'Mauer im Kopf' in a way that many Germans without his background cannot.

3.2 East German Citizen

3.2.1 Ich kam mir von der ersten Sekunde an wie ein Außenstehender vor

At first glance it is perhaps surprising that Max Becker, Jurek Becker's father, chose to stay in Germany after the war, occupying a flat in Berlin just a few miles away from his former concentration camp. Why not emigrate to Brooklyn, Buenos Aires or Tel Aviv, Jurek Becker asks? Yet his father felt that East Berlin, where the fascists had been defeated and which was now occupied by the same communists who had liberated him from the camp, had the least chance of a resurgence of nationalism and as such represented one of

the safest places for him and his son to be at the time. However questionable this logic may be, it so transpired that Jurek Becker found himself in Soviet-occupied Germany immediately after the war. He was later to assert that the fact that he is seen at all as a German is simply 'die Folge einer Reihe von Zufällen', a claim which clearly shows just how fragile he considered this German identity to be. (EG: 177)

In order to ease their transition into the new German society Max Becker invented a false past for himself in the same way his son has Aron do in *Der Boxer.* Max pretended to the authorities to have been born in Fürth in Bavaria, of which he knew the town hall and all its records to have been destroyed during the war. Combined with Max's claims that he had lost all his papers in the camp, this meant there was no way for the authorities to either disprove or validate his claim to citizenship and they had no real option but to comply. (Gilman 2002: 41)[46] As the son of a German, the young Jurek Becker also received German citizenship. Peculiarly, Becker tells the same story in his 1994 essay, 'Mein Vater, die Deutschen und ich', but presents it as the truth, that his father really was born in Bavaria and moved east as a boy with his parents. It is not clear why Becker does not tell the truth in this essay.[47] Perhaps even half a century after settling in Berlin, Becker still felt the need to authenticate his Germanness, to define it in a legal and legitimate context.

Whatever Becker's motives may have been here, his father's lie 'vereinfachte die Prozedur des Hierbleibens enorm. Dennoch hatte unser Zuzug natürlich nichts mit Heimkehr zu tun, ich kam mir von der ersten Sekunde an wie ein Außenstehender vor'. (EG: 180) This feeling was due in no small part to the fact that Becker was nine years old by the time he started school and yet still could not speak German properly:

> Es war ja nicht eben prestigeträchtig, zu den gestern noch Verfolgten zu gehören, und wenn man dazu als einziger weit und breit nicht richtig sprechen konnte und wenn man zu allem Unglück die Klassenkameraden – richtiger müßte ich sagen: die Klassenfeinde – um ein hübsches Stück überragte, dann brauchte man nicht lange nach Problemen zu suchen. Es war für mich beinahe eine Existenzfrage, so schnell wie möglich mein Deutsch zu verbessern. (WS: 11)

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[46] See Gilman (2002: 38-52) for a detailed account of Max and Jurek Becker's move to East Berlin.

[47] Becker certainly knew his father's real past from the archive research he conducted into *Jakob der Lügner,* where he found his and his family's ghetto papers. (Graf & Konietzny 1991:59) In addition to changing his place of birth from Łodz to Fürth, Max Becker altered his date of birth from 1900 to 1906, something which Becker also has Aron do in *Der Boxer.*

This concept of an 'Existenzfrage' is alluded to in *Der Boxer*, when Mark is beaten up at school. The traits which signify his difference to the norm bring him into potential physical danger. As a boy Becker was first and foremost concerned with eradicating these tangible differences that were so obvious to his classmates and hoped that 'wenn die Fehler ganz und gar aufhörten, würden sie mich eines Tages, wenn auch fälschlicherweise, sogar für einen der ihren halten'. (WS: 12)

The clause 'wenn auch fälschlicherweise' is key here to Becker's own understanding of his German identity. While on the one hand he strives desperately to assimilate, on the other hand he is kept on the perimeters of German society by his own feelings of otherness and by the invisible differences which others still perceive in him. When asked in 1978 at what point (if any) he had begun to consider himself a German, Becker replied:

> I've never felt like a German, nor have I tried to. And I've never considered myself a Pole. I wouldn't know how to go about it and it doesn't seem desirable to me. Every bit of progress in learning the language made me feel less like an outsider. I think I was about fifteen when I was finally able to speak German without someone being able to hear the difference between me and the others. But that wasn't enough to stop me feeling like an outsider. I was together with schoolmates who still carried the difference between us in their minds, who still heard a difference when it was no longer audible. It didn't depend on my own determination or my own efforts, but on the attitude of others. I could only consider myself fully integrated when I changed my surroundings, when I met new people who knew nothing of my "secret". (Zipser 1978: 409)

Here it appears that despite Becker's best efforts, others still perceived a historical difference between themselves and him. The implication is that for Becker to eradicate this difference he had to conceal his past as a victim and thus present an insincere identity to those around him. Moreover, Becker would suggest that his own efforts to integrate were genuine but in vain. Yet this claim is belied by 'Mein Vater, die Deutschen und ich', in which Becker explains how he was taught by his father to feel 'different' from early childhood. 'Er fragte: Wie behandeln dich die Deutschen in der Schule? Er lehrte mich, wie ein Zuschauer zu leben, und als er eines Tages zu erkennen glaubte, daß mir diese Haltung nicht mehr gefiel, sagte er: Laß sie ruhig spüren, daß du nicht zu ihnen gehörst – sie werden es sowieso nie vergessen.' Becker later claimed he was unable to remove this sense of difference instilled in him by his father. (EG: 180) However, it seems that his

father's influence itself constructed in part Becker's inherently complicated understanding of Germanness. Despite encouraging his son to feel different from Germans, Max Becker refused to speak to him in any other language than German from the time of their reunion at the end of the war in order to help him overcome this very tangible marker of difference from his peers. Similarly, they devised a scheme of financial reward for correctly written school work: 50 Pfennigs for a page with a five Pfennig reduction for each mistake the page contained. (Gilman 2002: 48)

At this young age Becker was politically unaware of the emergence of two separate and distinct German identities and his feeling of otherness was in response to a generic concept of Germanness as evil, as instilled in him by his father. However, Becker later returns to this early period of the GDR in his novel, *Der Boxer*. Although this book is primarily concerned with Jewish identities and as we noted in Chapter One, with Becker's strained relationship with his father, it is clearly located in the Soviet sector of occupied Germany and then the GDR. As is also the case in *Bronsteins Kinder,* a permanent feeling of difference, of living 'wie ein Zuschauer' in the GDR is the fate of many of Becker's characters who are Holocaust survivors and then after the war become permanently isolated from society. This is not true exclusively for Becker's Jewish characters, but affects non-Jews too. In *Der Boxer*, Aron's only real friend is a non-Jew, Ostwald, who had been a young judge embarking on a promising career before spending the war imprisoned in a concentration camp for his communist beliefs. After the war Ostwald deals out such strict sentences to Nazis that he is removed from his post and eventually slips resentfully into alcoholism before committing suicide. Although only a minor character in the novel, Ostwald plays a significant role as he suggests that it is the stigma of a victim-identity in the land of perpetrators, rather than a specifically Jewish identity, that prevents Holocaust survivors from assimilating into GDR society. Indeed, he serves to remind the reader that not only Jews were victims of the National Socialists and the irony of his surviving the camp only to later kill himself underlines the irreparable damage caused by this experience. The criticism of the GDR in the text is subtle yet unmistakable. The fact that a communist of such strong conviction is unable to integrate into the newly formed communist state and is eventually driven to such despair as to commit suicide, is a clear attack on the GDR for its failure to integrate those who had suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

For Becker, the preferential treatment one received as a victim of fascism in the GDR, even if it was meant in a positive way, only served to perpetuate the difference between victim and non-victim and the deformities this brought with it. 'Leute, die der Sonderbehandlung unterliegen, sind immer gefährdet - auch wenn diese Sonderbehandlung manchmal wie ein Vorrecht aussieht.' (Hage 1986: 338) And as we saw earlier, it was in part the perpetuation of this identity that continued to exclude Becker from mainstream society. The perpetuation of this victim identity in the discourse of the GDR is thematised strongly in *Bronsteins Kinder,* where Becker tried to show that 'Opfer sein heißt aber auch: deformiert sein. Kann es nicht auch häßlich machen? Ich bin aus Filmen gewöhnt, schöne Opfer zu sehen'. (Hage 1986: 337) In an echo here of the way Becker subverts the notion of Jew in *Jakob der Lügner,*[48] in *Boxer* and *Bronstein* the dysfunctional and even criminal characters break down the stereotype of Holocaust victim, the social identity which kept Becker at arm's length from his peers growing up in the GDR.

3.2.2 Ich war kein normaler deutscher Junge

Yet despite this feeling of otherness from Germans, Becker claimed he did not feel discriminated against as a Jew and maintained that he never experienced any anti-Semitism in the GDR. (Zipser 1978: 408) This claim is belied to some extent by the frequency with which he returns to the theme of Jewishness in his fictional and essayistic writing,[49] but it does suggest that in the GDR Becker felt he faced fewer prejudices than later on in West Berlin. Further, in contrast to his statements above regarding his inability to assimilate, Becker did achieve a sense of belonging on some level in the GDR. In an interview in 1992 Becker explained: 'Ich war kein normaler deutscher Junge', but in acquiring the German language along with 'durchschnittliche Sitten und Verhaltensformen', Becker aspired to overcoming this difference from his peers (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 109). One of his earliest moves in this direction was joining the FDJ as a teenager. 'I must say that my reasons for joining were not primarily political ones. It was more a question of wanting to be like the others – nearly all my friends were members. [...] Furthermore, a lot of people I liked were in the FDJ, and I wanted to be as much like them as possible.' (Zipser 1978: 408)

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[48] See section 1.2.3.

[49] There is a fuller discussion of this point in section 1.4.2.

So despite the invisible differences Becker describes as ever-present in his relationships with Germans, he began to feel a strong affinity for the GDR. In 1955 Becker joined the *Kasernierte Volkspolizei* (KVP). 'I enlisted – no one forced me to; I was convinced that my homeland (whatever that is) needed me.' (Zipser 1978: 409) Moreover, as Becker matured into adulthood, he was offered further positive affirmation of his East German identity as he became a member of various social groups: Becker was accepted to study at university, where he also became involved in student cabaret and newspaper work; he was admitted to the *Schriftstellerverband der DDR* then elected to its executive committee; he was awarded several prizes for his writing, including the *Nationalpreis der DDR* in 1975. Each of these events not only authenticated Becker's place as a GDR citizen, they also supported him in his chosen profession of author and offered him the chance to be involved in social discourse, something which was key to Becker's understanding of what it meant to be a citizen.

What emerges, therefore, is a paradoxical picture of identity, revealing Becker's relationship to the GDR to be full of tensions and contradictions. Due to the rigorous education from his father, Becker cannot help resenting all Germans and experiences an insurmountable feeling of difference from his peers. Despite this Becker strives to assimilate in the GDR and finds that if he hides his past, he can consider himself 'fully integrated' in groups which know nothing of his secret. This integration is artificial, however, as by projecting this deliberately insincere self identity to a group into which he wishes to assimilate, Becker causes these groups to hold a false perception of him. Notwithstanding these differences, Becker openly displays a strong affinity and sense of patriotism for his 'homeland', demonstrated not least in his decision to join the army. In his discussion of these points Becker shows himself to be aware of the multiple, contradictory nature of these identities and their perpetuation by the discourse which surrounds him. It appears that for Becker, the notion of a GDR identity is in some way distinct from and transcends the narrow, negative Germanness his father describes. The positive professional and political opportunities offered by the GDR represent hope for the future and are thus seen as separate to the oppressive historical notion of Germanness which Becker held. However, as the lack of freedom and repressive nature of the GDR becomes clear to Becker, so his loyalty to the country wanes. The implicit attack on the GDR in *Der Boxer* is indicative of this growing disillusionment. Nevertheless, the fact that for so many years Becker's work does not engage with the difficulties of assimilation for

victims of the Holocaust in any depth and instead focuses on the problematic nature of Jewish identity and the process of becoming a writer, suggests that, after reaching adulthood at least, this was not a central concern for Becker until the mid-1970s.

3.2.3 Ich [halte] den Mund lieber auf den Bahamas

The year following Wolf Biermann's expatriation was a particularly difficult time for Becker.[50] After refusing to apologise for signing the letter in support of Biermann, who was a good friend of his, Becker had his SED Party membership revoked and was expelled from the executive committee of the *Schriftstellerverband*, from which he later resigned altogether. In parallel to this professional turmoil, Becker's personal life was also in a state of instability. In the summer of 1977 Becker separated from his wife of fifteen years and at the same time Manfred Krug, who had been Becker's closest friend since they were students, moved to West Berlin. A *Stasi* report on Krug's leaving party records Becker as saying 'er gebe sich höchstens noch vier Wochen, dann packe er auch'. (Krug 1998: 264) In public Becker was being more cautious. One month after Krug left, Becker insisted in an interview with *Der Spiegel* that he wanted to stay in the GDR and claimed he had given no indication that he intended to leave.

However, at that time Becker was waiting to hear whether his novel *Schlaflose Tage*, which is far more openly critical of the GDR than any of his previous works, would be published and in the same interview he offered a barely concealed warning as to what would happen if the book was rejected, remarking that he wanted to remain in the GDR as an author who could publish what he wrote. 'Wenn es allerdings darum geht, den Mund zu halten, dann halte ich den Mund lieber auf den Bahamas.' (Rumler & Schwarz 1977: 133) Here Becker is clearly privileging his identity as a writer above that of GDR citizen. The outspoken manner in which Becker conducted this interview signalled a definite shift from his earlier, more restrained behaviour, something he acknowledged himself, explaining 'daß sich in den letzten sieben, acht Monaten meine Identität verändert hat. Vielleicht mag einer der Gründe darin bestehen, daß ich jetzt 39 Jahre alt bin und plötzlich die Furcht spüre, mich mit 60 Jahren immer noch taktisch zu verhalten – zugunsten von etwas, das dann gar nicht da ist'. (Rumler & Schwarz 1977: 130) Professionally Becker found himself

[50] See section 4.3.3 for more detail on Becker's response to Biermann's expatriation and the repercussions this brought for him.

unable to operate in the GDR, his work was not published and his expulsion from both the SED and the executive committee of the *Schriftstellerverband* suggested his views and influences were no longer desirable. On a personal level, with the collapse of his marriage and the loss of two close friends to the West, there were fewer things to hold Becker in the GDR than previously. The change in identity Becker notes in himself suggests that his GDR identity, in the sense which he has hitherto experienced it, now ceases to exist. Here it is clear that Becker sees a very limited future for the GDR itself, yet there is no new national identity for Becker with which he can replace this loss.

Nevertheless, while Becker had by this point realised he had to leave the GDR, he was adamant this was to be on a temporary basis only and was not prepared to relinquish his GDR citizenship. Indeed, when he was warned in a conversation with Deputy Minster for Culture, Klaus Höpcke, shortly after he gave the critical interview cited above, 'falls er seine Haltung nicht ändere, könnte die DDR evtl. daran interessiert sein, sich von ihm zu trennen', Becker was quick to assure the authorities that this was not his intention. (BStU MfS AP/2275/92) Hence when he left the GDR in December 1977, Becker claimed this was a temporary situation, an opportunity for travel and to regain some control over his writing[51] and he initially spent six months in the USA. In order to avoid any more bad publicity, the GDR granted Becker a generous exit visa which allowed him to reside in the West yet make unlimited visits to the GDR to visit his sons and his friends. This was, however, only valid for two years in keeping with Becker's expressed intention of returning to East Germany. In an interview with Richard Zipser in May 1978 Becker explained that 'at the very latest I will return to East Germany when I've finished the book I am now working on [*Nach der ersten Zukunft*]'. (Zipser 1978: 413) When asked if he would visit East Berlin on his return to Germany Becker replied:

> To clarify things once and for all: I won't visit East Berlin from West Berlin; at best I'll visit West Berlin from East Berlin. That's not a small distinction. [...] At the moment I am an East German author whose latest book is banned in East Germany. I sincerely hope that I will never be an East German author whose two latest books are banned. And that I will never be forced to contemplate what I should do then. (Zipser 1978: 415)

Höpcke's threat to Becker had clearly made him aware of the fragility of his East German citizenship at that time, and it is a measure of how strongly he valued this that Becker initially refrained from giving any interviews or making any criticism of the GDR in the

[51] See section 2.1 for a further discussion of Becker's professional reasons for leaving the GDR.

West German media on moving West.[52] Becker's comments here, however, are as provocative as the *Spiegel* interview cited above and in *Nach der ersten Zukunft* Becker displays no reticence in criticising the GDR.

3.2.4 After the Initial Future

The *Stasi* report of *Nach der ersten Zukunft* notes the mercilessly critical tone of the volume and concludes 'daß man es mit gutem Gewissen und politischer Verantwortung nicht annehmen könnte. und zurückweisen müßte. [*sic*] Obgleich es in der überwiegenden Mehrheit, bis auf wenige Stücke, gut erzählt ist. und literarisch gut gemacht ist [sic]', which is more than can be said of the report in any event. (cited in Arnold 1993: 23) Becker was under surveillance by the *Stasi* from 1959, though it is unlikely that he knew about it from such an early date. However, by the time he left the GDR he was well aware of the extent and ways in which he was observed, to the point where he even developed some scope for manipulating the authorities. In his edited volume on writers and the *Stasi*, Heinz Ludwig Arnold (1993: 16) recounts a story Becker told him of being visited around 1976 or 1977 by a West German newspaper journalist who wanted to interview Hermann Kant but had been prevented from doing so by the *Schriftstellerverband.* The journalist wanted Becker to put in a good word for him. Becker felt that a good word from him would not amount to much and suggested a more likely solution: The journalist should phone Becker from his East Berlin office and explain that he had hoped to interview Kant but had been refused, and ask if Becker would like to give an interview instead. Becker would then ask for two days to consider, during which time the journalist was to contact Kant again who, Becker (correctly, as it later transpired) assured the journalist, would have had a change of heart. Becker was sufficiently aware of the level of surveillance in the GDR to realise that the *Stasi* would hear of this invitation. As Kant was a far less critical voice than Becker, it would then be suggested to the *Schriftstellerverband* that the journalist should be allowed his first choice of an interview with Kant in order to avoid a potentially embarrassing interview with Becker being published.

Despite the wry humour of this story, it demonstrates quite clearly the 'tactical behaviour' required in the GDR that Becker was rejecting. This is a recurrent theme

[52] After this period of reticence in criticising the GDR, Becker gave a highly critical interview in 1980 to *Der Spiegel*. This is examined in some detail in section 4.4.1

throughout *Nach der ersten Zukunft,* the very title of which announces 'the disappearance of [Becker's] utopian hopes for the GDR – the implied second future presumably lay elsewhere' (Rock 2000a: 106), and is exemplified in the story 'Der Verdächtige', a text singled out for criticism in the *Stasi* report mentioned above. The geographical setting of the story is ambiguous and it could be read as representative of any country within the eastern bloc. Similarly, the text contains strong political criticism of repressive state mechanisms and of the individuals who conform to these systems, problems which Becker felt existed in both capitalist and communist societies. However, if we consider 'Der Verdächtige' in the context in which it was written, namely in the immediate aftermath of the Biermann affair, we must also read it as a more specific depiction of Becker's perception of what it meant to be a GDR citizen at that time.

The piece opens with the narrator appealing to the reader to believe that he is a loyal citizen who considers the security of the nation to be something 'das wert ist, mit beinah aller Kraft geschützt zu werden'. (NZ: 259) Yet seemingly without reason, this man has become an object of suspicion and discovers irrefutable evidence that he is being observed by the authorities. The narrator considers observation of individuals to be 'nützlich', even 'unverzichtbar' in principle, but when applied to someone as innocent as himself he finds it 'sinnlos und, wenn ich offen sein darf, auch [...] kränkend'. (NZ: 260) In order to prove his innocence, the narrator breaks off contact with anyone who could be seen as a suspicious or undesirable connection, beginning with his girlfriend. He avoids all conversations with colleagues at work and is pleased 'daß ich mit der Zeit kaum noch wahrgenommen [werde]'. (NZ: 263) He exchanges his colourful wardrobe for a grey suit and only leaves the flat when absolutely necessary. He telephones nobody and ignores incoming calls until there are no calls anymore. In this way he is able to slide into 'einen angenehm sanften Zustand, der kaum von Schlaf zu unterscheiden war'. (NZ: 265) He fleetingly worries that so much inactivity could be perceived as suspicious in itself but tells himself he has to chose between an option and its opposite: 'ich könne ja nicht alles beides für gleich verdächtig halten, ansonsten bliebe mir ja nur verrückt zu werden'. (NZ: 263)

Of course, the implication is that the narrator has clearly slipped already into a type of madness, rejoicing that he has managed to suppress his identity to such an extent that he has no social contact and that his life is spent in a state of utter passivity. Although the GDR itself is not mentioned in the story, indeed there is no spatial setting given, the parallels with the GDR are noted even by the author of the *Stasi* report on the book

(Arnold 1993: 16). David Rock (2000a: 111) similarly finds the story to be set in the the GDR and points to the irony that it is the state 'whose former head Ulbricht once boasted "Bei uns bleibt niemand allein" which is itself the cause of this character's isolation'. The psychological effects of surveillance on this character are no less severe for his admission that no one has forced him to act in this way. After a year of this lifestyle the narrator realises he is being followed home from work one evening and that his efforts have been in vain. He resolves not to spend another year in such a way and decides 'dem ersten Menschen, der mich grüßte, in die Augen zu sehen und "Guten Tag" zu antworten, egal was daraus werden würde'. (NZ: 269) David Rock correctly shows that this cannot be seen as a glimpse of hope, as the narrator continues to 'justify the behaviour of the "protectors" of the state in his own case'. (Rock 2000a: 112) An analysis of the opening passage further betrays the narrator's conformity and lack of real conviction in the state: 'Seit meiner Kindheit bin ich ein überzeugter Bürger, zumindest strebe ich danach' (NZ: 259), he maintains, seemingly unaware of the oxymoron in this statement. The contradictions continue as the narrator explains: 'Ich weiß nicht, wann und wo ich eine Ansicht geäußert haben könnte, die sich nicht mit der vom Staat geförderten und damit nicht mit meiner eigenen deckte; und sollte es mir unterlaufen sein, so wäre es nur auf einen Mangel an Konzentration zurückzuführen.' (NZ: 259) The narrator seems to find it perfectly normal to permanently concentrate on aligning his views to the demands of the state. Moreover, his bold 'egal was daraus werden würde' may not be based entirely in paranoia – he was, after all, put under surveillance for no discernible reason in the first place. While the blame is shared here between the state, for its oppressive mechanisms, and the narrator, for his shameless conformity, the implication is that the narrator is responsible for asserting his identity and will not achieve happiness as long as he remains a conformist.

This is also the central theme of another piece in the volume, 'Allein mit dem Anderen', which follows the story of a mid-level civil servant who feels a kind of 'Lustlosigkeit' (NZ: 211) overshadowing his life due to the fact that he lives according to other people's rules and not according to his own desires. The story is not explicitly located in the GDR, but once again it can be read as Becker's view of the problems associated with being an East German citizen in the late 1970s. Indeed, there are many implied parallels with the GDR, not least in the *Behörde* where the protagonist works. Here he is unhappy in his career, with his wife, and admits he would gladly exchange his children for cleverer, prettier ones who would not bear any resemblance to himself. His life

has become a pretence as he outwardly conforms to the opinions and behaviour that external pressures impose on him, to the extent where he has suppressed his own identity for so long that he is no longer certain who he is. 'Wenn ich am Abend das Licht endlich lösche und zu mir sage, daß ich mich bis zum nächsten Morgen nicht mehr zu verstellen brauche, dann weiß ich nicht mehr selbst, wie ich zu sein habe.' (NZ: 212) Yet these pressures are not strong enough; he wishes they were visible and tangible. 'Dann könnte man seinen Zorn von sich auf die Bedränger lenken, man wäre einer, für dessen Handlungen andere verantwortlich sind.' (NZ: 212) Rather than accepting responsibility for his unhappiness and recognising his conformity as the root of his problems he is eager to find someone or something else on which to blame his 'Lustlosigkeit'. The solution to this problem is found when the narrator is robbed at gunpoint. He realises that during the mugging he had no choice but to hand over his wallet as the thief demanded so he steals a revolver from a friend, a policeman who is subsequently demoted for his negligence. He then uses this revolver against himself and threatens himself with it if he does not behave in an acceptable manner. He finds this relatively easy as even as a child he possessed the ability to slip into the role of another personality. 'Ich kann das so umfassend tun, daß, während ich der Andere bin, ich selbst so gut wie nicht mehr existiere.' (NZ: 212) What the narrator perceives as a quality, a capability, does, in fact, suggest a lifetime of conformity. Although there is no perceptible change in his behaviour for others, for he continues to conform as he always has done, the other now controls his behaviour with the threat of violence: 'ich war mit mir im reinen'. (NZ: 218) He clearly sees himself and his *alter ego*, the other, as two separate entities and applies the word 'Befehlsnotstand' (NZ: 218) to his situation. Initially the gun proves to be an asset and so successful that the protagonist finds he does not even have to carry it, the knowledge that it exists is enough of a threat in itself. He is promoted (illustrating how dishonesty and opportunism are rewarded in the GDR), his relationship with his wife improves and she admits she had previously considered leaving him. Yet these accomplishments are relative. Previously the narrator found no satisfaction in either his career or his marriage and it is only in the face of mortal danger that he is able to achieve success in these areas, implying he might have found more genuine happiness if he had left his wife and job. This is reminiscent of the problems Gregor faces in *Irreführung der Behörden,* and thus the protagonist's identity crisis can be read as suggestive of the position of the intellectual in the GDR. The

censoring mechanism has been internalised by the individual to the point where coercion is no longer necessary, the individual continues to behave as the censor would demand.

After a year the other no longer obeys the narrator and also begins to rebel. The other tells him to write a truthful report for his seniors describing the entire authority as inefficient and demanding its closure, a report that would surely mean the end of his career. Then at the last minute he is ordered to tear up the report and write what is expected of him from his seniors. 'Es was doch nur ein Spaß.' (NZ: 225) Yet the other was strangely silent while the damning report was being written, the words coming from the narrator himself, who explains, 'daß sich, während ich das alles schrieb, zu meiner Angst eine Art von Lust hinzugesellte, die ich mir ohne Schaudern nicht erklären kann'. (NZ: 224) Coupled with the fact that the narrator does not feel relieved or happier after he is told to destroy the derogatory report, this suggests that this was a possible point of liberation for him, a chance to voice his own opinions and free himself from social, professional and private constraints, yet he does not seize this opportunity. The narrator now refers to the other as 'Er' rather than 'er', which suggests a higher or superior being. The narrator has lost all control of the other and at the end of the story he finds himself standing by the shores of a lake. The revolver, which he wants to throw into the waters and thus rid himself of the other, is aimed at his head. 'Es ist ein auswegloses Verhängnis. Ich will nicht ewig stehen mit der Waffe an meinem Kopf, nur so dazustehen ist vertane Zeit. Doch handeln kann ich nicht, bevor ich mich nicht dazu entschließe. Kaum aber denke ich, wie ich möchte, ist es aus mit mir.' (NZ 226) The unhappy ending met by the protagonist here is reminiscent of the works of Kafka, an author Becker greatly admired.[53] As with Josef K. in Kafka's *Das Schloss,* the narrator's conformity and refusal to accept responsibility for his actions are so severe that he has lost control of his thoughts. By suppressing his identity so completely and succumbing to both external and then self-imposed restraints and pressures he has entirely lost his sense of self and thus his ability to act and think independently.

The two stories above clearly direct blame at the narrators for their conformity and opportunism, yet this blame is also shared by the state (which remains nameless but bears unmistakeable resemblance to the GDR) for imposing such oppressive measures as to require this conformity. The isolation and psychological terror experienced by the protagonist of 'Der Verdächtige' is reminiscent of Christa Wolf's novel *Was bleibt,* written in 1979 and published a decade later. Wolf's highly autobiographical text depicts a day in

[53] See 'In Kafkas Verliesen', a contribution from Becker to a teaching book on Kafka. (EG: 37)

the life of an East German writer who suffers intimidation and fear as she is spied on. Her home is broken into, her mail opened, the telephone bugged, and in such a claustrophobic atmosphere the protagonist begins to suspect everyone around her of being part of the surveillance mechanism and withdraws into her own private sphere as a means of protection.

One story in the volume, 'Das eine Zimmer' represents the antithesis of the two discussed above. Here a young man visits the housing office to apply for a flat for himself and his fiancée in order that they can move out of their parents' houses and get married. They envisage that their flat will comprise four rooms: living room; bedroom; workroom (as he works from home); and most importantly one final room which they will call a 'Probierzimmer'. (NZ: 229) This room will be kept deliberately empty and used for 'practice', as to how one can best furnish a room, or live most comfortably. This will not be done on a literal level of moving furniture in and out all the time. 'Vielmehr sollte sich in jenem Raum vor allem unsere Phantasie bewegen.' (NZ: 229) The young couple will not view the 'Probierzimmer' as their private property and are prepared to open the room to all those who do not have such a place and would like to experiment with it. The incredulous woman dealing with the narrator's request is adamant that no such room will be authorised and says the best advice she can give him is to tear up his application and apply again to a different authority, this time asking for three rooms without mentioning the 'Probierzimmer'. Yet the young couple are determined to be honest. 'An einem erschwindelten Zimmer hätten wir wenig Freude.' (NZ: 231) They want to be able to develop their intellectual and imaginative experimentation openly. 'Wir wollten nicht irgendwann beim Phantasieren ertappt werden, wie bei etwas Verbotenem.' (NZ: 232) As the narrator insists on keeping this room, even if it is the only room in their flat, and the authorities steadfastly refuse to allow this, the couple are left with no choice but to continue living with their parents.

Unlike the previous two stories, the narrator here is blameless. He and his fiancée are honest with the authorities and are not prepared to make sacrifices in areas they consider important. The room, which is clearly a metaphor for a sphere for creative thought, writing and free expression, is denied to them by the oppressive state mechanisms. The young couple avoid the mistakes of conformity and opportunism made by the other two narrators, yet their fate is no happier and they are left doubting their convictions after this experience. 'Wir beginnen uns zu Fragen, ob denn das Zimmer

tatsächlich so wichtig ist, wie es uns bisher schien. Meine Braut sagt ja, ich sage nein, manchmal ist es auch umgekehrt.' (NZ: 238) This story clearly indicates that Becker saw no chance of intellectual or imaginative freedom in the GDR. The narrators of 'Der Verdächtige' and 'Allein mit dem Anderen' compromise themselves so severely as to suffer total crises of identity, while the option of refusing to compromise these ideals leads to frustration and self-doubt.

Becker's negative depiction of these individuals here represents an early attempt on his part at distancing himself from his East German identity as it is called into crisis by the situation in which Becker finds himself. This is something which he takes up in earnest during the *Wende* period as this identity is once again fundamentally destabilised and Becker for the first time explicitly draws comparisons between the GDR and the Third Reich. Here we see an early hint of this in that the protagonist of 'Allein mit dem Anderen' describes the situation he has created for himself as a 'Befehlsnotstand' (NZ: 218), a term which in Germany is historically loaded with connotations of people being forced to carry out orders for the Nazi regime. Hence Becker's concept of a GDR identity is no longer something wholly positive and diametrically opposed to the historical notion of Germanness Becker inherited from his father, rather we see now that he begins to define these two German identities in similar terms.

3.3 West German Citizen

3.3.1 Auf einmal bin ich Europäer

After Becker left the GDR with a two-year visa on 5 December 1977, he initially stayed with a school friend in West Berlin before accepting a long-standing offer of a visiting professorship from Richard Zipser at Oberlin College, Ohio. Becker spent just over five months in America until July 1978 when he returned to West Berlin. From there he continued to visit the GDR twice weekly to see his wife, who had continued to be a close friend despite their recent separation, and their two sons. (Gilman 2002: 193) Becker remained close to his family and dedicated *Nach der ersten Zukunft* to his wife and sons. In December of that year Becker's new partner, Hannah, an Oberlin student, came to West Berlin to join him. The following year Becker continued to travel, accepting visiting professorships in Essen and Edinburgh. Throughout this time Becker was completing *Nach*

der ersten Zukunft, which he had begun while still in the GDR and on the surface it seemed that Becker made the transition from East to West quite easily.

On closer examination, however, it becomes clear that this period was fraught with underlying tensions and contradictions on the part of Becker about his future. As we saw in the previous section, Becker had worked hard from his childhood onwards to integrate into GDR society and now despite his arguments with the State, he insisted it was still his home. In the first interview he gave in America, however, he had provocatively suggested this was not such a certainty. These contradictions continued on Becker's return to West Berlin from America, when he initially spent so much time in the GDR that it seemed he may well have intended to reside there once more. In October 1978 he declared in East Berlin: 'Ich will nicht in einem Staat Leben, in dem meine Bücher nicht gedruckt werden.' Ten days later Becker told the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* 'er habe vor, "zwischendurch immer wieder an seinen Wohnort nach Ostberlin zurückzukehren"'. (cited in Gilman 2002: 193) It seems that it is partly because of suggestions from the West that Becker has chosen to stay there that he feels obliged to profess his intentions of returning to the GDR. Here one is reminded of Uwe Johnson's *Zwei Ansichten* (1965), where a young couple who had only fleetingly met and had not formed a strong relationship suddenly are willing to risk anything to be together after the building of the Berlin Wall prevents their casual meetings. The novel is narrated in turn by B, a West German photographer and D, an East German nurse who manages to flee to West Berlin with a false passport. When she arrives there, however, B realises that the bond he felt with D when forcibly separated is, in fact, superficial, their identification with each other false. The relationship only became important to him when external forces sought to prevent it. In the same way Becker becomes particularly defensive of his East German identity when others suggest it might soon cease to exist. Wolfgang Emmerich (1996: 434) refers to Hilbig's poem 'Fragwürdige Rückkehr' to illustrate the dilemma facing the double-German author. Hilbig wrote this in 1986 when, after years of tension in the GDR including a brief imprisonment, he finally moved to the West with a visa valid until 1990: 'es ist als ob ich wiederkommen sollte / und etwas auch als wollt es mich vertreiben / es ist als ob noch keine zeit vergangen wäre / säumnis – als zögerte noch immer in den wänden / weil ich nicht wegblieb und nicht wiederkehre / ein feuriger wink von geisterhaften händen.' (Hilbig 1986:53)

One possible reason behind Becker's confusion is the large amount of travelling he did in this period. Becker's frequent visits back to the familiar surroundings of the GDR and his family there can only have served to emphasise the strangeness of his new environment. Furthermore, when Becker's new partner, Hannah, who spoke no German, came from the USA to live with him at the end of 1978 Becker was faced with the task of integrating them both into West German society. The travel in itself also presented Becker with new facets of his identity, something he contemplates in 'New Yorker Woche', a short piece written in diary form in *Nach der ersten Zukunft.* Early in 1978, before taking up his position in Oberlin, Becker spent a week as a tourist in New York and in this short time he begins to define himself in different terms. 'Mir fällt auf, wie oft ich plötzlich EUROPA denke, ein Wort, daß mir zuvor kaum in den Sinn gekommen ist. Bis hierher gab ich mir immer viel detailliertere Namen: ich war Berliner, ich war Köpenicker. DDR-Bürger. Ein Deutscher – das kam mir schon exotisch vor. Und auf einmal bin ich Europäer, nicht weniger.' (NZ: 148) A few days later Becker is required to consider this exotic German identity again as he attends a church service in Harlem where all visitors are asked to call out where they come from. 'Als ich an der Reihe bin, nenne ich ein seltsames Herkunftsland: *Germany.* Ich weiß ja gar nicht, was dieses Wort bedeutet, und sage es trotzdem. Die Leute vor mir, Westdeutsche, haben auch gesagt: *Germany.* Und ich hatte das Gefühl, daß mein korrektes *German Democratic Republic* wie eine Zurechtweisung klingen würde, die nicht hierhergehört.' (NZ: 155) In a wider international context the local identities by which Becker has previously defined himself merge into the generic identity of 'German' or 'European'.

Yet Becker finds this wider identity rather exotic and strange and would clearly prefer to continue to see himself as an East German. The clause 'die nicht hierhergehört' in the last quote suggests that he does indeed want to rebuke the West Germans for their clumsy terms of reference but recognises this is not the right situation in which to do so. Although he chose to leave the GDR, Becker still seeks to affiliate himself with it, personally and politically when defined in contrast to the West, the contradictions and tensions which are seen in the interviews and comments discussed above continued to prevent Becker from integrating into West German society. In private conversations with the East German authorities, however, Becker had repeatedly stressed that his return to the GDR would be dependent on *Nach der ersten Zukunft* being published there. (BStU MfS

AP2275/92) When, for a variety of reasons, the volume only appeared in the West,[54] Becker wrote to Klaus Höpcke, explaining: 'Es haben für mich die Schwierigkeiten, hier zu Leben, während der vergangenen zwei Jahren nicht abgenommen, sondern sie sind, wie mir scheint, erheblich angewachsen.' (Gilman 2002: 205-6) Becker reiterated that he wanted to retain his East German citizenship and requested an extension of his current visa, which was authorised by Honecker himself. (Gilman 2002: 206) On 11 December 1979 Becker was issued with a visa allowing him to cross the border between East and West Berlin as often as he liked, it was valid for a decade. Hence Becker privileges his identity as a writer above that of being East German, but is still not prepared to relinquish this citizenship.

3.3.2 Heimisch bin ich nur am Schreibtisch

At the beginning of the new decade then, Becker's stay in the West began to seem as though it would be longer than he had initially been prepared to admit. The ten-year visa extension allowed Becker to make long term plans and he and Hannah settled into their West Berlin apartment. However, Becker continued to feel 'verbunden' to the GDR, or to the people there at least. (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 207) This sentiment was common amongst many authors of Becker's generation who had left the GDR at the same time. They had grown up believing in the State and later as authors felt they had been in a privileged position of being able to exert a positive influence on this society. One example here is Günter Kunert. Like Becker, Kunert signed the initial letter of protest at Biermann's expatriation and in the autumn of 1979 he left the GDR for very similar reasons to Becker. At first Kunert was anxious to confirm his belief in communism and also that he still considered himself to be a part of the GDR's literature. 'Ich habe ja in der DDR 23 Bücher veröffentlicht, von 1950 an. Was ist denn DDR-Literatur, wenn nicht ich auch?' (cited in Emmerich 1996: 422) This identification with the East soon waned for Kunert, but Becker was by no means alone in continuing to feel connected to the GDR. Thomas Brasch, who in 1976 was one of the first authors to leave the GDR in the wake of the Biermann affair, still insisted in 1987 that he was a GDR citizen and that all of his disagreements with the Party had been about the way in which socialism was practised and never about whether it should be practised. For Emmerich (1996: 425) 'Braschs Stellungnahme zeugt von der

[54] These reasons are elaborated on in section 4.4.1.

tiefen Verwurzelung sozialistischer Ideale bei vielen in der DDR aufgewachsenen Menschen, die im Westen oft unterschätzt wurde'.

In line with this concept of remaining politically rooted in the GDR, Becker became involved in the Peace Movement in the early 1980s but was excluded from a peace meeting of writers in West Berlin in 1983 along with other ex-GDR writers in order to not offend the East German authorities.[55] (Gilman 2002: 212) Over four years after he had left the GDR, Becker was still labelled in the West as an ex-GDR author. It is hard to miss the irony that after years of striving yet ultimately failing to assimilate in the GDR, it was only after he had left the country that Becker was seen by (West) Germans as a German, specifically as a GDR citizen in contrast to his new, western surroundings. His socialist ideals and political actions defined Becker as an outsider in West Berlin and his frequent visits over the border combined with his continued involvement in GDR political life perpetuated this view. The first two books Becker published after leaving the GDR, *Schlaflose Tage* and to a lesser extent *Nach der ersten Zukunft* are in places very GDR-specific, further confirming this identity.

Yet while those around him were beginning to project him into the role of the East German he had always tried to be, Becker himself was beginning to feel alienated from his GDR background. In an echo of the contradictions and tensions discussed earlier, Becker admitted in a 1980 interview that he did not want to return to the GDR but that he could equally not distance himself from it. 'Ich fürchte mich vor einem endgültigen Schnitt. Ich möchte ein Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit nicht abreißen lassen.' In explanation Becker continued: 'Hinzu kommt die vage Hoffnung, daß vielleicht in der DDR Entwicklungen eintreten, die dazu führen, daß man auf solche wie mich wieder Lust bekommt. Ich wäre dann gern wieder dort.' (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 207) Despite this continuing optimism Becker was very clear that it was his decision to stay away from the GDR at that time. 'Die Rückkehr in der DDR ist mir nicht unmöglich gemacht. Ich *will* nicht. [...] Ich schätze die dortigen Zustände so ein, daß ich nur unter erschwerten, extremen Bedingungen arbeiten könnte, und dem entziehe ich mich.' (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 207) Moreover, Becker was beginning to feel estranged from his old life in the GDR:

> Ich muß erkennen, daß meine Beziehungen in die DDR hinein auf merkwürdige Art dünner geworden sind. [...] Ich bin zwar relativ häufig dort, doch wenn ich hinfahre, fühle

[55] Becker's involvement in the Peace Movement and in other areas of political life in West Germany is examined in section 4.4.3.

> ich mich kaum mehr wie jemand, der nach Hause fährt. Ich besuche Leute. Und auch von diesen Leuten werde ich anders gesehen als früher, nicht mehr wie einer, der mit ihnen lebt. (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 212)

Becker had lost his sense of feeling at home in the GDR without gaining any sense of belonging in the West. Moreover, the phrase 'auf merkwürdige Art', indicates that this is wholly unexpected for Becker and suggests that he is unsure of how to react to the new situation. When asked in a 1983 interview if he felt at home in his position of Bergen-Enkheim writer in residence, Becker replied: 'Heimisch [...] bin ich nur am Schreibtisch.' (Schwarzenau 1983: 11)

3.3.3 Aller Welt Freund

In 1982 Becker published his first work to be written completely in the West, *Aller Welt Freund.* The novel begins with the failed suicide attempt of narrator-protagonist Kilian, a journalist on a national newspaper. 'Schritt für Schritt bringt sich die Scheißmenschheit um', believes Kilian and he decides to take care of 'Die Sache' himself by sealing the doors and windows of his landlady's kitchen – she has left for a three week holiday – and turning on the gas. (AF: 18) Typically for Becker, the tragic subject material is laced with irony and almost farcical comedy, the first such episode being during 'Die Sache' itself, when Kilian, unable to remember whether gas is heavier or lighter than air, plummets from the chair he has placed on the table in order to be at least half way correct and breaks his arm. (Un)fortunately, the landlady, Frau Abraham, returns from the airport, her flight cancelled due to thick fog, just in time to rescue her lodger, who escapes with mild gas poisoning and, of course, the broken arm. The remainder of the novel takes place over the rest of a single week in October 1980 as the reasons for Kilian's suicide attempt emerge. In his job as a journalist he has become so horrified by the news he researches and reports every day that he is no longer able to see anything good in the world. Moreover, Kilian takes the constant flow of bad news personally. He feels it is directed at him, 'daß rund um die Erde eine Verschwörung gegen mich im Gange ist [...]. Daß auf sämtlichen Kontinenten, in allen Ländern und beinahe in jeder Stadt zahllose Entscheidungen nur deshalb getroffen werden, um mich, Kilian, zu demütigen, zu verängstigen und am Ende umzubringen'. (AF: 20)

Aller Welt Freund received a very mixed reception from critics. Sulamith Sparre (1983: 72) condemns it in the *Frankfurter Hefte* as an unconvincing story full of clichéd characters and as Dieter Schwarzenau (1983: 11) comments in the *Rheinischer Merkur*, many criticisms of the novel focus on the fact that it is set 'im idealogischen Niemandsland'. In contrast to the very specific temporal setting of 13 to 18 October 1980 (AF: 51), there are no clues as to the spatial setting of the novel. There are elements which suggest an omnipotent state apparatus: the man from the *Behörde* who visits Kilian to ascertain if he presents a threat to national security (AF: 60); the innocent colleague, Plattner, falsely imprisoned for gathering information 'im Dienste einer fremden Macht'. (AF: 162) Yet at the same time there are indicators that the novel is set in the West, not least the facts that Kilian receives a private room in the hospital at an extra cost and everyone owns a car. As we noted earlier, Becker continued to be seen in the West as a GDR author and such ambiguity was not expected of him by the readership and critics on either side of the border. This in itself offers one explanation for the vague setting in that Becker sought to rebel against this imposed role of dissident or 'Widerstandskämpfer'. (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 212)

However, there is another motivation behind this ambiguity. Hannes Krauss correctly argues: 'Die Unschärfe des Handlungsortes zeugt nicht von mangelnder Entschlußfreude des Autors, sondern sie ist ein Bild seiner aktuellen Ortlosigkeit.' (Krauss 1997: 296) Becker became alienated from the GDR and was no longer seen by people there as 'einer, der mit ihnen lebt' (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 212), while at the same time he was unable to assimilate into his new surroundings. Not only was he seen as an outsider, he also saw very little in West Germany with which he could construct a positive sense of identification. This is further reflected in the way that the novel falls thematically outside the box for Becker, being his only novel that does not explicitly tackle either Jewish or GDR-related themes. This sense of confusion and loss was common amongst authors who moved to West Germany around the same time as Becker. For example, Jürgen Fuchs experienced West Berlin as a 'Niemandsland' (cited in Emmerich 1996: 424) and Thomas Brasch, expressed the uncertainty he felt about the West in the following poem: 'Was ich habe, will ich nicht verlieren, aber / wo ich bin will ich nicht bleiben, aber / die ich liebe, will ich nicht verlassen, aber / die ich kenne will ich nicht mehr sehen, aber / wo ich sterbe, da will ich nicht hin; / Bleiben will ich, wo ich nie gewesen bin.' This poem could also have been written by Kilian, through whom Becker expresses his own fear and

disorientation. Those close to Kilian recognise his fear. Kilian's girlfriend, Sarah, tells him 'Ich lebe in einer unteren Welt und du in einer oberen [...]. Unsereins kümmert sich um Dinge, die für euch oben lächerliche Kleinigkeiten sind. [...] Ihr habt pausenlos das Schicksal der Menschheit im Auge.' (AF: 91) This idea of Sarah, who is representative of mainstream society, and Kilian living in two separate worlds further perpetuates the image of Kilian as an outsider.

Similarly, Kilian's twin brother, Manfred, sees Kilian's sensitivity as the root of his problems:

> Ich hätte es versäumt, er weiß nicht wie und wann, mir ein Abwehrsystem zuzulegen, das Störungen und Turbulenzen von meinem Innern fernhalte. [...] Dort, wo andere in der Lage seien, zu ignorieren, aufzuschieben oder zu vergessen, dort breche für mich bereits Panik aus. Nie käme ich auf diese Weise zur Ruhe, nie hätte ich Zeit, meine Verletzungen auszukurieren. Kaum beginne die eine zu heilen, schon ritzte ich mir an drei anderen Stellen die Haut von neuem auf. (AF: 139)

Becker explained in an interview with Dieter Schwarzenau (1983: 12) that in *Aller Welt Freund* 'ging es um die Sicherheit einer Person, richtiger um ihre Unsicherheit. Kilian habe sich vergewissern wollen, seine Identität finden zu wollen. Dies sei ein übergreifendes Problem'. In the same way that Becker used *Irreführung der Behörden* to examine the problems facing him as an East German author, he writes here in search of a solution to the difficulties he faced as an outsider in the West. After Frau Abraham rescues Kilian, he realises he has a choice to make. 'Sollte ich mich später fürs Weiterleben entscheiden, dann werde ich lernen müssen, verzweifelt zu sein, ohne Angst zu haben.' (AF: 19) This same sentence could surely be applied to Becker and the situation in which he found himself in West Berlin, to which we will now turn our attention.

3.3.4 Faschismus-Reste, von denen ich mich umzingelt fühle

In the years after the publication of *Aller Welt Freund* it would seem that Becker did indeed achieve some level of assimilation in the West. In 1983 he was elected as a member of the 'Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung' in Darmstadt and one year earlier he had accepted the prestigious position of writer in residence of Bergen-Enkheim, following in the footsteps of writers such as Wolfgang Koeppen and Peter Härtling. These two events served to confirm his place in the West German literary elite while at the same

time Becker was about to become a household name with his television series *Liebling Kreuzberg.* When Manfred Krug was approached by ZDF in January 1983 to play the part of a lawyer in pilot episode of a new television series, the producers were still looking for someone to write the series itself and Krug suggested Becker. Initially Becker was reluctant but he eventually agreed and began work on the first series in 1983. (Gilman 2002: 231) The first series, broadcast in 1986, was an immediate success, claiming fifty percent of the available audience. Even now the series has its own webpages on *Das Erste Online.* However, we saw in Chapter Two that Becker's decision to return to the medium of television in the 1980s was in fact a measure of the insecurity he felt as a writer at this time rather than a positive affirmation of any desire he felt to influence a wider audience with his work. Moreover, any sense of belonging Becker had developed in the West by the early 1980s had been wholly undermined in 1983 when he received death threats after discussing his Jewishness on a radio talkshow.[56] The threats, which took the form of phone calls and letters, were considered serious enough for Becker to be placed under constant police protection. Becker approached *Der Spiegel* with the story and there were initial negotions regarding publishing an interview or an article relating to this, although nothing was ever produced. Curiously, Becker later regularly denied ever having directly experienced anti-Semitism in either German state. A *Stasi* report on this event concluded: 'Die Tatsache, daß faschistische und antisemitische Tendenzen derart ausgeprägt in der BRD und Westberlin existieren, ließen ihn stark daran zweifeln, ob es richtig sei, aus der DDR wegzugehen. Er fühle sich jetzt total heimatlos.' (BStU MfS AP 2275/92)

At this time Becker was also concentrating on more personal concerns. In 1983 he separated from Hannah, and his new partner Christine moved into his West Berlin flat. They married three years later. Between 1983 and 1987 Becker gave just one interview and the only essay he published was his inaugural speech at the 'Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung'. It seemed that in order to overcome the difficulties he faced in integrating into West German life, Becker was withdrawing himself from the political sphere and its attendant expectations, preconceptions and pressures. By refusing to comment on political issues Becker was rejecting his unwanted social identity of GDR dissident. After the frank and open expression of his disorientation and confusion in *Aller Welt Freund,* Becker returned to the question of his Jewish roots. He began an intensive study of Nazi war crimes and in particular concentrated on the court cases of Nazi war

[56] This is also discussed in section 1.5.1.

criminals. (Gilman 2002: 221) In September 1984 Becker and Christine travelled to Israel and on their return Becker began work on *Bronsteins Kinder*. In the same way that much of Becker's political literature perpetuated his East German identity long after he moved to the West, the recurrent Jewish references even in his works which did not have an overtly Jewish subject matter continued to identify Becker as a Jew and thus as an outsider in West Germany. *Aller Welt Freund* has a number of Jewish references not least in the names of Frau Abraham and Kilian's girlfriend Sarah. 'Übrigens heißt sie Sarah, weil ihr Vater die Araber nicht leiden kann, ihr Bruder heißt Jakob.' (AF: 59)[57] Similarly, Amanda and Stanislaus' lawyer in *Amanda herzlos* is of Jewish ancestry, but changes his name to hide this.

In 1986, at the same time as *Liebling Kreuzberg* was first broadcast, *Bronsteins Kinder* was published and thus coincided with the beginning of what became known as the *Historikerstreit*. The *Historikerstreit* began with an essay by Martin Broszat in May 1985, which called for an 'historicisation' of the treatment of Germany's National Socialist past in order that the 'taboos' surrounding the issue could be eliminated and the nation allowed to move forward and look to the future. However, the argument only really emerged for debate in the public sphere after the prominent historian Ernst Nolte's essay, 'Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will,' was published in 1986 and claimed that unlike any other history, the German National Socialist history grew larger over time to the point where all contemporary discourse was overshadowed by it. A debate ensued between those who would see the Holocaust consigned to history in order to end the stigma of victim attached to those who had suffered as a result of it and to allow a 'normalisation' of the German identity, and those who considered such a view to be dangerous, most notably here Jürgen Habermas, who accused such historians of being revisionists trying to create a presentable political profile for Germany by relativising the Holocaust. Initially Becker did not become involved in the *Historikerstreit*. However, when Martin Walser published his speech 'Über Deutschland reden. Ein Bericht' in *Die Zeit* on 3 November 1988, Becker was outraged and responded with his own essay just two weeks later.

Walser's essay concerns the division of Germany and his desire to see the county as he remembers it from his childhood. He opens with the impossibility of discussing one's childhood memories in Germany and notes that whenever he tries to talk about this time he is unable to explain 'die Unschuld der Erinnerung'. (Walser 1989: 77) He does not attempt

[57] See here Hannes Krauss' analysis of the novel, which focuses largely on the Jewish motifs within the text.

to deny or relativise the Holocaust in any way and admits that Germany deserved to be punished, but argues that this punishment has now gone on for too long. For Walser, the continuing division of Germany has no sense, both states are 'resozialisiert' he claims. 'In Ost- und Westdeutschland kein Anzeichen irgendeiner Rückfallmöglichkeit.' The only motive to keep the two Germanys separated is 'das Interesse des Auslands'. (Walser 1989: 83) Walser even blames the division of Germany for the continuing existence of fascism: 'ich [mache] gern den Fehler, meinen Widersachern vorzuwerfen, sie verewigten den Faschismus dadurch, das sie auf antifaschistischen Haltungen bestünden'. (Walser 1983: 85)

Becker reacted furiously to Walser's text and in *Die Zeit* of 18 November 1988 published his own response: 'Daß Walser kein Ohr dafür hat, wie "Interesse des Auslands" klingt! Und daß er keinen der Faschismus-Reste wahrnimmt, von denen ich mich umzingelt fühle!' (EG: 83) This concept of still being surrounded by fascism is the focus of Becker's essay and he is enraged by Walser's suggestion that it is those who insist on anti-fascism who perpetuate fascism themselves. To follow that argument to its logical conclusion, he reasons, one would also have to see that by their appearance, women are responsible for rapes and that Jews cause anti-Semitism by their very existence. It becomes clear that Becker, for whom fascism is a 'Möglichkeit, die gegenwärtig ist und im Auge behalten werden muß' (EG: 83), sees Walser's approach to fascism as *Verharmlosung*:

> Walser tut, als sei Faschismus eine Streitigkeit innerhalb der Familie gewesen [...] Tut mir Leid, aber von meiner Familie sind an die 20 Personen vergast oder erschlagen worden oder verhungert, irgendwie spielt das für mich noch eine Rolle. Ich habe nicht so kuschelige Kindheitserinnerungen wie Walser, sollte das der Grund sein, warum Deutschland eher seinesgleichen gehört als meinesgleichen? (EG: 82)

This last comment here is key to Becker's lack of integration in West Germany. Despite his literary successes in the West and his adoption by the public as the author of one of Germany's most successful television series, he does not belong there. As he continues to be viewed in political terms, Becker is still projected into the role of East German dissident even a decade after leaving the GDR. Although his rejection of this dissident identity through a withdrawal from political life combined with the mass appeal of his television series could offer him the chance to assimilate, he does not establish any sense of belonging. His own feeling of difference from Germans, which was instilled in him by his father in early childhood and is perpetuated by his own experiences of anti-Semitism in the

West, prevents Becker from integrating into a society which he perceives as full of fascist undertones.

The contradictions and tensions we considered at the beginning of this section remain present throughout Becker's career. In September 1989 Becker commented that if he had to designate one place as his home, it would be West Berlin, 'kein anderer Ort ist mir zur Zeit näher und vertrauter'. (Gilman 2002: 235). However, in a lecture Becker gave at the same time he remarked: 'Ich lebe seit geschlagenen zwölf Jahren hier im Westen und bringe immer noch kein Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit zustande. Es wäre niemandem zu verdenken, wenn er die Geduld mit mir verlöre, ich selbst werde ja ungeduldig. Immer noch komme ich mir wie ein Besucher vor.' (WS: 37) Becker does not and cannot assimilate fully in West Berlin but realises nevertheless that there is no better alternative for him at this point.

3.4 Die Wende

3.4.1 Über den Umgang mit DDR-Vergangenheit

The speed of change and level of confusion which accompanied the *Wende* period in Germany, not only in relation to the fall of the Wall but also after the formal process of unification itself, precipitated feelings of turmoil with regard to personal identity in many German citizens. The initial euphoria at the collapse of the Wall, which was seen by many to symbolise the end of the Cold War, soon evaporated as the size and scale of the problems confronting the new Germany swiftly became apparent. Indeed, many Germans, from both sides of the border, felt no enthusiasm for unification from the outset with various German intellectuals, most prominently here Christa Wolf in the East and Günter Grass in the West, warning firstly against the dangers of a hasty unification and then later highlighting the social problems which arose as a result of unification.[58] In the period immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall, many East Germans intellectuals hoped and campaigned for the continuation of a separate but politically reformed East German state and it was to this school of thought that Becker initially belonged, as we saw in the last section from his dialogue with Martin Walser. Thus, like Wolf and other East Germans who had hoped for reform, Becker was particularly hard hit by unification and suffered

[58] See, for example, Grass' *Rede vom Verlust* and Wolf's *Reden im Herbst.*

something of an identity crisis as the GDR, and with it his own nationality, quite literally ceased to exist.

We have already seen how after Becker left the GDR he gradually became estranged from the people there who began to view him as an outsider yet was not able to establish any sense of belonging in the West, something reflected in his decision to retain his GDR citizenship. Although he had continued to repeatedly express hope for the future of the GDR and the possibility he might be able to return there as a writer one day, he had begun to distance himself politically from East Germany during the late 1980s[59] and had attempted to dissociate himself to an extent from his fellow GDR citizens even in the late 1970s. After the fall of the Wall and in particular after the March 1990 elections, Becker takes up this criticism in earnest in his essay 'Zum Bespitzeln gehören zwei' (subtitled 'Über den Umgang mit DDR-Vergangenheit'). Written in August 1990, the focus of this essay is the passivity and conformity of a nation which Becker describes as a 'Bevölkerung von hoher Unterwerfungsbereitschaft,' (EG: 139) allowing themselves to be watched by the *Stasi*, which he likens to 'Smog'. (EG: 140) By a simple law of numbers, Becker argues, the authorities would have been powerless against any mass uprising or protest at their surveillance tactics from the people and it was as a direct result of their own passivity and conformity that the GDR people fell victim to *Stasi* surveillance. At first the text appears to offer nothing new from Becker – his loathing of conformity had been expressed in numerous texts from *Irreführung der Behörden* onwards – yet on closer examination we see there are several references to fascism where Becker draws parallels between the GDR and the Third Reich, something only previously hinted at in his work. In a manner reminiscent of the narrator in 'Allein mit dem Anderen', Becker begins the essay with a complaint at those who apply the word 'Befehlsnotstand' (EG: 136) to their situation in East Germany and the fact that this term is accepted to excuse any former opportunistic behaviour by citizens of the GDR. Further, Becker goes on to suggest, 'daß der Zwang zur Anpassung von den meisten DDR-Bürgern viel härter empfunden wurde, als es im Dritten Reich der Fall gewesen ist; denn vermutlich war die Identifizierung der Bewohner mit dem Nazistaat viel größer als später in der DDR'. (EG: 138) In a final comparison of the two states Becker looks at what he sees as a tendency 'die Schuld an den Taten Nazi-Deutschlands ins Führerhauptquartier zu karren und dort abzuladen' (EG: 143), expressing

[59] See section 4.5.2.

the hope that people will be more honest in dealing with their GDR past and accept responsibility for their actions.

Although the text is presented as a criticism of East German conformity, by implication Becker is clearly grouping together here the German people of the Third Reich and the GDR. Now that the hope the GDR represented is gone, he equates this previously positive identity with his father's historic notion of Germanness. The East Germans, from whom Becker earlier claimed never to have felt any expression of anti-Semitism (Zipser 1978: 408), have now become indivisible from the Nazis who killed his family and the West German state where he feels 'umzingelt' by remnants of fascism. (EG: 83) Thus Becker is attempting to dissociate himself finally and absolutely from the people of the GDR, despite still holding GDR citizenship himself. In his descriptions of Germans as people willing to conform to corrupt and evil regimes, Becker is contemptuous of all things German and seems to be creating his own position as an outsider here.

In the early 1990s Becker continues this criticism. In a 1992 interview discussing the problems of establishing sovereign control over his work in the GDR in the face of conflicting pressures from the state and the readership, Becker is disdainful of the GDR population. He describes East Germans as 'eine[r] Gesellschaft von Feiglingen' who were happy to allow intellectuals to protest on their behalf while preferring to remain silent and avoid any repercussions themselves (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 117). In his essay of 1993, 'Eine Art Einheit', Becker returns to a comparison of contemporary Germany with the Third Reich and this essay thus represents a further attempt by Becker at creating a notion of Germanness as other. The essay opens once again with a reference to the Nazi regime:

> Niemand wird ernsthaft behaupten, in der Naziherrschaft habe es nenneswerte Unterschiede im Verhalten der Ost- und der Westdeutschen gegenüber dem Staat gegeben [...] Warum nur sind heute die meisten Westdeutschen überzeugt davon, sie hätten sich in vierzig Jahren DDR nicht so würdelos verhalten wie die meisten Ostdeutschen? (EG: 163)

While the main focus of Becker's attack is this West German sense of superiority towards the East, he also criticises the tendency of those from the East to deny that they had ever supported the regime. With great sarcasm he declares he can well understand the West German complaints 'sich ausgerechnet mit denen da drüben vereinigen zu müssen. [...] Es ist keine angenehme Vorstellung, bis ans Ende der Tage mit seinesgleichen verbunden zu sein'. (EG: 166) Here Becker is explicitly rejecting any positive concept of an East

German identity he held before as he no longer makes any distinction between the GDR, the capitalist West and Nazi Germany. In an even more overt manner than we saw earlier in 'Zum Bespitzeln gehören zwei', Becker is rejecting all forms of Germanness as different and other.

3.4.2 Die DDR-Jahre, die mir fehlen

However, at the same time as Becker published 'Zum Bespitzeln...' he was also working on his final novel, *Amanda herzlos*.[60] That the novel is based in East Germany and narrated in three sections which can be read as representing different phases of Becker's life there reveals a continuing concern with events in the GDR and undermines Becker's essayistic attempts at distancing himself from this identity as we saw above. Thus there is a tension developing between Becker's dissociation from all things German and from the GDR specifically, and his decision, even a need, to locate *Amanda herzlos* in East Germany. Furthermore, Becker admitted to David Rock (2000a: 134) that in this final novel he had written down 'die DDR-Jahre, die mir fehlen' and through his three male narrators, all of whom are professional writers in some capacity, Becker attempts to come to terms with the demise of the GDR through a literary reworking of his own experiences there.

In defiance of the expectations of critics waiting for a *Wenderoman*, particularly from an author with experience of life on both sides of the border such as Becker, *Amanda* provocatively finishes in January 1989, and thus the change in the GDR political climate leading up to the fall of the Wall is only implied in the novel. While Chapter Two argued this was a deliberate rejection by Becker of the expectations projected onto him by critics, it is also likely that in the same way Becker had never felt able to set his fiction in the West without feeling like an intruder 'der sich in die Geschäfte fremder Leute mischt' (WS: 37), he was now unsure of how he should proceed if he were to take the novel into the new, and for him, westernised Germany. As was the case for many East Germans at the time, he was faced with the task of having to redefine and reposition himself in the new society, while at the same time the events that were unfolding were creating new identities for Becker and denying him his old GDR identities.

The *Wende* presented dual problems of loss and change then, as it was not only the loss of the GDR many authors mourned, rather the hope and future possibilities it

[60] See section 2.6 for a fuller discussion of this novel.

represented. This was certainly the case for Becker (1990d: 90). 'Um den Verlust braucht man nicht zu weinen, wenn man die tatsächliche Situation [der DDR] vor Augen hat [...]. Der Westen hat gewonnen, *das* ist das Problem.' In 1995 Becker explained further: 'Als ich aus der DDR in den Westen kam, gab es, zumindest theoretisch, die Möglichkeit, daß ich zurückgehen konnte. Das geht heute nicht mehr.' (EG: 243) This involuntary amputation is poignantly highlighted in the closing lines of *Amanda herzlos* as Amanda tries to reassure her son about their imminent move to the West. 'Was hältst du von folgendem Vorschlag: Wir geben uns ein halbes Jahr, und wenn du danach zurück willst, dann ziehen wir wieder zurück.' (AH: 384)

Becker was by no means the only ex-GDR author to return thematically in his writing to the place which physically no longer existed, and the 1990s saw a the production of a large body of literature focused on what became known as *Ostalgie* (a nostalgia for the East). For Emmerich (1996: 458-9), Volker Braun's poem 'Nachruf', (later also called 'Das Eigentum') is one of the best examples of the identity crisis the collapse of the GDR caused amongst its authors:

> Da bin ich noch: mein Land geht in den Westen.
> KRIEG DEN HÜTTEN FRIEDE DEN PALÄSTEN.
> Ich selber habe ihn den Tritt versetzt.
> Es wirft sich weg und seine magre Zierde.
> Dem Winter folgt der Sommer der Begierde.
> Und ich kann *bleiben wo der Pfeffer wächst.*
> Und unverständlich wird mein ganzer Text.
> Was ich niemals besaß, wird mir entrissen.
> Was ich nie lebte, werd ich ewig missen.
> Die Hoffnung lag im Weg wie eine Falle.
> Mein Eigentum, jetzt habt ihrs auf der Kralle.
> Wann sag ich wieder *mein* und meine alle.

Here Braun expresses a sense of helplessness and loss as his *Heimat* is taken from him in the sense that his own needs and opinions are not accounted for here. The opening line suggests Braun still holds the same values and hopes as before, but now the GDR, which was the political space in which he hoped to realise those dreams, no longer exists. Hence his own narrative or identity ceases to make sense in the new social order. The hopes and aspirations he had held for the future will now never become reality, as though these

dreams themselves had been a trick. This identity crisis is also suffered by Wolfgang Hilbig, another reluctant East German exile, who, in his 1992 story 'Die elfte These über Feuerbach'[61] records 'a state of post-traumatic shock'. (Corkhill 2002: 79) The protagonist, W., is an ex-GDR author invited to give a lecture at Leipzig University. During a taxi journey on the eve of the lecture W. desperately tries to compose some stimulating ideas to discuss, but finds himself unable to formulate clear opinions. He is 'an intellectual with nothing substantial or profound to say in the post-*Wende* climate of freedom of speech. It is a self-inflicted silence born of bewilderment and insecurity'. (Corkhill 2002: 80)

Another prominent East German intellectual to suffer from this crisis of identity was Christa Wolf, who, as we noted earlier, had always been in favour of a reformed East German state and had vehemently opposed unification. On 4 November 1989 she had made a speech at the *Alexanderplatz* demonstration, hoping to inspire others to follow her in these aspirations: 'Stell dir vor, es ist Sozialismus und keiner geht weg.' (cited in Emmerich 1996: 458) Wolf has never overcome her disappointment at the loss of these dreams. As late as 1994 she gave an interview which focused primarily 'on her efforts to reassert an East German identity and to encourage fellow East Germans to do the same, as a means of making personal headway in today's context of a socially and economically divided society'. (Tate 1995: 8) The implication is that for Wolf, the only way she can maintain her identity is to resist integration into unified Germany and remain there as an outsider, an East German in a westernised society.

For a younger generation of authors, such as Thomas Brussig, who was born in 1965, the sense of loss was not so great. Brussig's 1995 novel *Helden wie wir* shows a strong need to come to terms with the GDR past, but in the sense of overcoming the power and oppression it represented. There is little suggestion that the GDR represented hope for the author. Brussig's narrator, Klaus Uhltzscht, begins his story with the revelation that it was he who brought down the Berlin Wall and ends it by describing how: by pulling off his underpants and ordering a shocked border guard, too stunned to resist, to open the gate. For the three hundred intervening pages Uhltzscht describes the last twenty years of the GDR from his childhood onwards, with his penis as the main focus of his narrative. We see Uhltzscht's life with his mother (hygiene inspector) and father (*Stasi* official), with the decline of an increasingly grim GDR as the backdrop. With such an outrageous narrator these two decades are related 'als reine Farce' (Emmerich 1996: 500) and the powerful

[61] Published in his 1993 collection of stories, *Grünes grünes Grab*.

state mechanisms which had once inspired fear are thus rendered laughable. For Roberto Simanowski, this is the core purpose of the novel: 'wer zum Lachen kommt, kommt über die Wende. Aus eben diesem Grund hat Brussig tatsächlich den Wenderoman geschrieben'. (Simanowski 1996: 160)

3.4.3 Wir sind auch nur ein Volk

In a continuation of these tensions between Becker's essayistic distancing of himself from the concept of Germanness as other and his need to consider his German identities through fiction, one year after writing 'Eine Art Einheit' Becker creates a new television series, *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk.* This is a nine-episode series about the problems facing Germans from both sides of the former border in the wake of unification.[62] Once again Becker is able to engage in the social discourse surrounding him and tackle difficult contemporary issues. It is significant here that Becker chooses to return to the medium of television, the only medium in which he had previously set his fiction in the West (in the form of *Liebling Kreuzberg*). In a 1994 interview Becker admitted that he still was not comfortable basing his prose in the West, that he still felt he was intefering in the 'Angelegenheiten fremder Leute'. (Doerry & Hage 1994: 195) In television, however, he did not feel this pressure and was no doubt further reassured by the thought of working again with best friend Manfred Krug in the lead role.

Typically for Becker, the story is abundant with humour and irony, present not least in the narrative structure itself. A prominent and well-respected West German author Anton Steinheim is commissioned to write the scripts for a television series about the problems of unification. Realising that he does not know any East Germans, he requests that the production company finds him 'eine typische Familie im Osten' (Becker 1994b: 35) to observe in order that he can inform himself about the GDR, which he finds 'unheimlich'. (Becker 1994b: 38) The family in question are the Grimms: Benno, 55, a former 'Dispatcher' who is at least as annoyed at the fact that nobody knows what this job actually was as he is at his current state of unemployment; Trude, Benno's wife, who, as the only breadwinner in the family is desperate to keep her job as a teacher; Theo, their son, who has dropped out of university and cannot find any meaningful employment; and

[62] Produced by Novafilm and broadcast on ARD. References given in the text are to the scripts published by Suhrkamp as listed in the bibliography.

finally Karl Blauhorn, Trude's widowed father, who as a result of unification has had to move in with his daughter's family as he is no longer able to afford his own flat. Steinheim is able to overcome his condescension towards television writing when he discovers how much he will be paid, as does his wife, Lucie, who persuades Steinheim to continue with the scripts whenever his resolve falters. Nevertheless, Steinheim is always keen to impress on others that television and high culture are not mutually exclusive and even cites *Liebling Kreuzberg* as a recent example of top quality television. (Becker 1995b: 9)

As the episodes progress the Grimms are revealed to be essentially kind-hearted people – even Benno displays great affection for his father-in-law when the latter is the victim of a violent mugging – and the viewer can easily identify with the characters. Each member of the family is in a worse position in the new Germany than they had been in the past. Trude now lives in fear of losing her job, and thus the only income the family has, as she has to pass a rigorous series of tests (known as 'Evaluierung') in order to be judged politically suitable to continue teaching, which, as she points out, was an indignity suffered only by East German teachers, not their western counterparts. Theo struggles to find any work at all. He insists in the first episode that reunification has improved rather than limited his possibilities, yet by the final episode Theo has despondently decided upon becoming a taxi driver. 'Ich hab mir vorgestellt, daß man in einem normalen Land normal arbeiten geht wie ein normaler Mensch... Aber plötzlich sind wir ein Volk von Imbißfritzen und Gelegenheitsarbeitern und Taxifahrern.' (Becker 1995c: 164) The disillusionment suffered by all the East German characters as their hopes for the future in the new Germany fail to be realised is exemplified in the form of Zinke, a friend of Blauhorn's and a fellow pensioner. Zinke explains to Steinheim a system he had developed during the time period between the fall of the Wall and the economic union of the two Germanys. Zinke had realised that he could buy a bottle of beer in the East for one *Ostmark* and, providing he removed the label first, return the empty bottle to a West Berlin supermarket to collect 20 Pfennig *Pfand.* With the exchange rate at one West German Mark to ten East German Marks, he could then change his *Pfand* into East German money and buy two more bottles of beer. For Zinke, this time was 'das absolute Himmelreich [...]. So'ne Zeit kommt nich wieder, die war einmalig'. (Becker 1994b: 125) Zinke's disenchantment with the reality of life in unified Germany and his recognition that the euphoric period immediately following the fall of the Wall is over for good is, of course, representative of the wider social mood.

The West German characters in the series are at times portrayed far less sympathetically than their GDR counterparts as rather superior and materialistic. Steinheim and his wife, Lucie, only initially believe the television project to be worthwhile for the huge pay cheque that comes with it, while Steinheim's repellent son from his first marriage must be heavily bribed to stay at school and complete his *Abitur*. The expensively dressed West Germans at Steinheim's birthday party are perfectly polite to Benno and Trude (who are only invited at Lucie's insistence) yet they behave in a condescending manner towards them and treat them almost as part of the entertainment, mirroring the way that Steinheim observes them every day. In contrast to Becker's earlier attempts to distance himself from the GDR, then, we see that he is still far more comfortable here than in the West and it seems that there is more than a trace of *Ostalgie* in the creation of these characters. Indeed, Becker is still clearly more distanced from the West German figures. When asked in interview if he had based Steinheim on himself, Becker replied in the negative. 'Steinheim ist ein Westmensch, und einen Westmenschen muß ich erfinden. Es ist mir bis heute nicht geglückt, einer zu sein.' (Doerry & Hage 1994: 195)

The series that Steinheim is supposed to write is never made. After months of observation of the Grimms, Steinheim is still unable to begin concrete work on the script and the impatient production company cancel funding for the project. David Rock (2000a: 146) notes here that the idealistic programme executive who envisaged the ultimate task of television as being 'die Menschen einander näherzubringen' (Becker 1994b: 11) has been proved hopelessly unrealistic. Although this is true on the larger scale on which the series was to be broadcast, on a personal level the two families have become a good deal closer. Steinheim did not know a single person from the former GDR before he began this work and found the very concept of the GDR mysterious. 'Irgendwie war die Mauer nicht nur die Grenze zwischen zwei Teilen Deutschlands, sie war auch die Grenze zwischen uns und der Mongolei.' (Becker 1994b: 38) Yet during the course of his work with the Grimms Steinheim becomes less an observer and more involved in their lives and thus realises, 'daß in der Entwicklung der letzten Jahre nicht nur eine große Chance für diese Menschen liegt, sondern auch ein gewisses Maß Ungerechtigkeit...' (Becker 1995b: 152) Implied here is what Becker perceived as a western sense of superiority over the GDR which in turn led to the discrediting of everything associated with the East, a view Becker aimed to combat in the series in a rather more subtle way than in 'Eine Art Einheit'. He wanted to communicate his annoyance 'daß so viele Westdeutsche überzeugt davon sind, die DDR

wäre mit ihnen nicht zu machen gewesen. [...] Oder ich möchte den Blick dafür öffnen, daß die unterschiedlichen Ansichten und Verhaltensweisen der Ost- und Westdeutschen so lange existieren werden, solange die Lebensbedingungen so unterschiedlich sind'. (Doerry & Hage 1994: 196)

In a similar way to Helga Königsdorf's three protagonists in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* (1993), who are struggling to cope with their lost hopes for the future and lost GDR identities, but who nevertheless are beginning to adapt to the changes around them, the Grimms are surviving in unified Germany. Ironically, the television series that will never exist goes some way to lessening the wealth gap between the Grimms and their western neighbours as they are well paid by the television company for allowing Steinheim into their home. Further, like a true capitalist, Benno sells his collection of over 300 model building kits after learning they are worth a small fortune. Yet what began as a financial arrangement on all sides has developed into a genuine mutual friendship, as the two families resolve to continue their relationship after the business arrangement is over. Steinheim is asked by Benno if he had hoped to have any positive influence on German relations with his series: 'In dem einen Augenblick habe ich's gehofft, im nächsten kam es mir aussichtslos vor.' (Becker 1995c: 195) Becker's own answer to this question lies in a newspaper article Benno reads to Trude about the series. 'Es scheint so, als könnte diese Beziehung, die ursprünglich nur auf Zweckmäßigkeit gegründet war, als ein Muster dafür dienen, wie die Menschen im West und Ost einander näherkommen – durchs Kennenlernen.' (Becker 1995c: 13)

It would seem, then, that the autumn of 1989 induced mainly feelings of confusion for Becker. There is an underlying tension throughout this body of texts which span almost a decade and comprise interviews, essays and fiction. Many of the texts seem to be distancing Becker from any notion of Germanness, either explicitly as in 'Eine Art Einheit' or implicitly as in some of the early GDR criticisms which liken this state to the Nazi regime. The failure of the GDR to reform politically or to realise any of its utopian dreams for the future has led to disillusionment for Becker. The recurrent theme of his post-*Wende* literature is that of political opportunism and the readiness of former GDR citizens to discard purported socialist ideals in favour of capitalism, the latter here being represented in Benno's decision to sell his beloved model building kits. On the other hand, Becker's concern with the social complexities he sees unfolding around him belies an underlying interest and identification with Germany, these problems are important to him; they are a

part of his identity. In the final analysis, despite the feelings of otherness to Germanness Becker professes himself unable to overcome, his ability to write *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk*, and so sensitively depict the issues the newly unified Germany faces, shows that he has an understanding of what it means to be German after the Cold War which surpasses that of most non-Jewish Germans.

3.5 Conclusion

The picture of Becker's German identity we see emerging here is full of contradictions and tensions that are with him, to some extent, to the last. Amongst Becker's earliest childhood memories are those of being taught to feel different to Germans by his father, who assures him his peers will never overcome this sense of difference themselves in any event. Indeed, encouraged by his father, Becker develops an understanding of German which is inextricably linked to the Nazi past. Nevertheless, we see that despite Max Becker's desire to keep his son separate from his German surroundings on the one hand, he also wants him to assimilate, or at least to eradicate the tangible markers of difference that construct his position as an outsider in the GDR. This is demonstrated not least in Becker's father's decision to only speak German with him after the war and also in the scheme of financial reward they developed for correctly written school work.

Despite this complicated approach to adopting a German identity Becker inherited from his father, he grew up in the GDR wanting to become a 'normal schoolboy'. (Zipser 1978: 408) Although Becker claims this assimilation was successful, it is only by denying his past and projecting a false identity to his acquaintances that Becker is able to consider himself integrated. Nevertheless, the official discourse of the GDR with its claims of being the only anti-fascist successor to the Third Reich enabled Becker to construct a positive GDR identity as something which was diametrically opposed to Nazi Germany and which transcended his father's historical concept of Germanness as other. Hence Becker was able to establish a positive sense of *Heimat* in the GDR, supported not least by his genuine ideological belief in socialism and the professional opportunities he was afforded as a writer there. However, when his identity as a writer is put under pressure by the state and, to an even greater extent, by the GDR readership, particularly in the aftermath of the Biermann affair, Becker chooses to privilege his identity as a writer above that of East German citizen as he leaves for the West. Here we also see Becker attempting to critically

distance himself from GDR citizens as, for the first time, his work suggests similarities between East Germany and the Third Reich.

In the first years after his move, Becker retains such strong bonds to the GDR and remains so politically involved that he is unable to establish any sense of belonging in the West. Becker's literature, which continues to be set in the East, and his socialist politics mean he is projected into the role of GDR dissident, ironically seen as an East German for the first time. Inevitably, Becker feels a growing sense of distance to the GDR, yet he is unable to construct any new sense of *Heimat* in a society where he finds no positive reference points with which to identify. This dislocation is further exacerbated by Becker's personal experiences of anti-Semitism in the West, which leave him feeling 'heimatlos'. (BStU MfS AP 2275/92)

Despite the destabilisation over a decade earlier of the feeling of *Heimat* Becker had achieved in the GDR, the *Wende* period still precipitates a crisis of identity for him. Once again, he seeks to distance himself from the East, his essayistic work now explicitly denigrating the GDR and its citizens as inextricably linked to the Third Reich and the historical notion of Germanness Becker had learnt from his father. Yet his fiction written in the same period belies a continuing interest with the problems of the former GDR and its citizens and suggests Becker feels a genuine need to engage in this discourse.

By the mid 1990s Becker has come to terms with the demise of the GDR and is able to view it in slightly more objective terms than earlier, suggesting this part of his identity as something distinct from Germanness is now less important to him than before:

> Die DDR hat von ihrer ersten Sekunde an mit einer Lüge gelebt [...]. Wir taten es als feindliche Verleumdung ab, wenn unsere Gesellschaft intolerant oder gewalttätig genannt wurde [...]. Wir konnten oder wollten nicht sehen, wie randvoll von Verlogenheit, und Schamlosigkeit und Fremdenfeindlichkeit und Untertanengeist und Denunziantentum und Unrecht [...] unser Staat war. (EG: 200)

Despite this disillusionment, it was only Becker's belief in this lie (or his self-deception) that enabled him to develop the positive concept of GDR identity in the first place. The fact that Becker now claims to recognise the inherent falseness of this East German identity suggests that he now sees his earlier belief as naïve and unrealistic.

In addition to Becker's coming to terms with the demise of the GDR, there are also signs that he is beginning to assimilate into German society and in a 1995 interview he admits to a closer sense of belonging than at any time previously. 'Vielleicht weiß ich gar

nicht, wie es ist, sich zugehörig zu fühlen [...] was ist der Indikator für Zugehörigkeit? Vielleicht fühle ich mich zugehörig und weiß es nur nicht...' (EG 243) This is a far more positive statement than that of six years earlier when Becker claimed he still felt like a 'Besucher' in West Germany. (WS: 37) Moreover, there are signs that he is beginning to overcome his father's previously impenetrable influence, though the contradictions continue. In his 1994 essay 'Mein Vater, die Deutschen und ich', discussing his childhood relationships with his peers, Becker emphasises the great influence his father had on him and writes: 'Vermutlich ist bis heute sein Einfluß auf mich nicht erloschen, so daß ich nie wissen werde, wann ich wie er klinge und wann wie ich selbst.' (EG: 180) Yet in the same essay, when discussing the present and the contemporary problems facing Germany, this influence does not seem so permanent. Like Aron in *Boxer*, Becker's father had always taught him not to be become involved in 'German' issues, 'die Deutschen haben *ihre* Sorgen, du hast deine. Aber plötzlich spüre ich, wie sein Einfluß schwindet. Im Unterschied zu ihm habe ich viele Jahre getan, als gehörte ich dazu, so lange, daß mir keine andere Rolle mehr möglich ist'. (EG: 184) Now, as the social discourse focuses on the problems Germany faces in the wake of reunification, Becker wants to be involved in discussions about what he terms '[...] der Versuch, zusammenzufügen, was bis heute nicht zusammenpassen will'. (EG: 183) He even goes on to refer to Germany as his homeland and expresses a desire to engage as a citizen in the debates around him. 'Ich habe definitiv kein besseres Land, ich möchte herausfinden, was mit meinem einzigen los ist.' (EG: 184)

Nevertheless, these comments are not all positive affirmations of Becker's security in a German identity. Even though he claims to be able to escape his father's influence, he only achieves this by playing a role and thus suggests he can only engage as a German citizen within an identity which he himself feels to be inauthentic. Furthermore, Becker has internalised the discourse that has signified him as a Jew and he has adopted this social identity. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Becker still defines himself as a Jew in contrast to Germans. 'Ich behaupte, daß das Verhältnis zwischen mir und meiner Frau ein Musterbeispiel dafür ist, daß ein unverkrämpftes Verhältnis [zwischen Deutschen und Juden] möglich ist.' (O'Doherty & Riordan 1998: 17) Becker's identity as a German is defined by such incongruities and conflicts and he is forced to recognise the fragility and ephemeral nature of this identity. 'Hin und wieder beschäftigt mich die Frage, ob Max Becker in unseren Tagen diesselbe Wahl seines Wohnorts getroffen hätte wie nach dem

Krieg, ob ich also auch unter heutigen Bedingungen Deutscher geworden wäre. Ich werde nicht müde, mich mir als einen anderen vorzustellen.' (EG: 182)

Chapter Four – Shifting Socialist Identities

4.1 Introduction

As we saw in Chapter Three, the Soviet zone of occupied Germany became the German Democratic Republic in October 1949, just months after the Federal German Republic had been founded from the Western Allies' occupation zones, and in terms of its political and national identity, the GDR was defined from the start as a reaction against and in opposition to its western counterpart. The adoption of socialist or communist values in the GDR was obviously not a natural or indigenous development of the people, rather the political system and forces of power in their entirety were imposed upon the population by external will. As such, the legitimacy of the SED's claim to power and indeed the validity of the state it controlled were constantly called into question. However, in the early years of the GDR, its claim of being the only anti-fascist German state legitimised the communist regime, as Emmerich (1996: 39) shows: 'Antifaschismus als Legitimations-bonus des Staates DDR (als des "besseren Deutschland"), als zentrales Sinnkonstrukt und Loyalitätsfälle zugleich: dies sind langlebige, Bindung aufrechterhaltende Merkmale dieses Landes und seiner Bevölkerung gewesen.'

In addition to supporting East German claims to national identity, such discourse also eased the way for the introduction of the SED and communist ideology into the GDR. The *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* had been formed in April 1946 by a merger (in the Soviet sector only) of the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Communists (KPD). The latter had initially emphatically refused any such merger, but, realising their lack of popularity, 'had come to the view that merger with the SPD was essential to any success at the polls and hence to popular legitimisation of their claim to power'. (Fulbrook 1995: 32) In the event, this merger amounted to little more than a takeover of the SPD by the KPD. Many of the Social Democrats unsurprisingly chose to flee, others were arrested and imprisoned or worse. Purges in 1948 and 1951 further rid the SED of anyone who favoured a more democratic, liberal approach and did not toe the Moscow line. Moreover, it soon became clear that the rights of the individual appeared almost as unimportant in the new state as they had been under Nazi dictatorship, yet such blatantly undemocratic practices were tolerated by the citizens of the new East Germany in these early years as they were seen as necessary steps on the road to achieving a socialist utopia. Marxist theory proclaimed: 'In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class

antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.' (Marx & Engels 1848) Yet Marx also recognised that this would be problematic to achieve; the dilemma, as Fulbrook (1995: 23) notes, expressed most clearly in Marxism-Leninism that 'the people were suffering from a "false consciousness" and could not recognise their own "true" interests.' Hence it became the task of the Party to take a leading role in the new society.

Despite the relative unpopularity of the KPD, the idea of a communist government was generally accepted, if not actually wholly embraced, as valid at the time. After the chronic instability of the Weimar Republic and the horrific nature of the Third Reich that this republic had given way to, capitalism had done little to prove itself in economic or political terms. Political conviction in the new GDR was based as much on an emotional reaction against fascism as it was on any intellectual or political choice. Further, there was perhaps some justification for doubting the ability of the German population to elect its own leaders or choose its own democratic course. Thus in the new state political decision-making was solely the task of the Party as Sigrid Meuschel, drawing on Ulbricht's 1946 *Plan des demokratischen Neuaufbaus*, shows: 'The SED, responsible to "all of the people" and vanguard of the "laboring masses", informed and guided by the theory of "consequent Marxism" would lead the democratic struggle. Majority rule was [...] defined according to class interests, which the vanguard party claimed to know and identify appropriately in all social and political spheres.' (Meuschel 1987: 202-03) With the founding of the GDR in 1949 the one-party control of the state was tightened further.

The first, and for that matter only serious threat to the SED's power (before the mid 1980s) was the Workers' Uprising in June 1953, a protest in response to the Party's decision to further increase production quotas for a workforce already disenchanted by the increasing disparity between living conditions in East and West Germany.[63] Although the demonstrators called for free elections and the resignation of the government along with the abolition of increased work norms, political ideology was neither the focus nor the cause of the uprising. As Fulbrook (1995: 179) has shown, 'demands for political change and for German unity did not provide the originating spark for the strikes [...] More important were domestic social and economic policies, combined with the inept and to some degree uncoordinated manner in which they were announced and introduced'. Hence

[63] This is outlined briefly in the introduction to Chapter Three. For a more detailed account of this uprising and a fuller discussion of its causes see Fulbrook (1995: 177-87)

it seems valid to argue that even at such an early stage of the GDR's existence, a significant proportion of the population had become disillusioned with its economic policies to an extent that was undermining whatever political loyalty they might initially have had to the SED regime.

For Becker, however, growing up at this time in the GDR, the events of 1953 seemingly had no effect on the strong commitment to communism he was developing and indeed these events fail to feature particularly in any of his texts.[64] As this chapter will explore in detail later, Becker grew up under the influence of his father to embrace communism as a natural part of rejecting fascism. Although he claimed to be unaware of having received a political education in the GDR, Becker was a member of the FDJ from 1951 and received glowing reports on his political behaviour from his school. Becker's initial socialist stance was lacking in political conviction and was based primarily on a desire to fit in, to be socially and politically acceptable in an attempt to eradicate some of the differences he felt as a victim of fascism which defined him as an outsider. However, by the time Becker joined the SED in 1955, the same year he left school, he claimed this decision was based on genuine ideological conviction. Although Becker experienced numerous disputes with the Party from the time he began studying philosophy in 1957, he claimed such disputes were merely superficial and did not affect the fundamental sense of loyalty he felt towards the SED. During his time at university Becker became a Marxist and produced many essays on Marxist theories. The more he engaged with communist ideology, the more apparent the discrepancies became to Becker between the theories of socialism he studied and identified with and the way socialism was practised in the GDR. Nevertheless, for the majority of the 1960s, long after he was forced to abandon his university studies on political grounds, Becker remained intrinsically loyal to the SED. Membership of a political group was key to Becker's understanding of what it meant to be a citizen and an author. Active involvement in political debate enabled Becker to feel he was participating in and shaping the society around him and was thus fundamental to his self identity.

We saw in the previous chapter how Becker struggled in the GDR to establish a sense of *Heimat* there in any geographical or national sense and this chapter will show how

[64] *Der Boxer*, the only piece of fiction Becker set during this period, makes a fleeting reference to the Workers' Uprising, but it is of very little consequence in the novel. Nor is it mentioned anywhere in his non-fiction.

for Becker, *Heimat* was far more a political construction, deeply embedded in his identity as a committed socialist. While Becker felt distanced from contemporary GDR society and from his Jewish roots by his experiences of the Holocaust and by post-war German discourse, his political convictions and affinity to the SED were strong enough to enable him to transcend these differences and establish a positive sense of identity in the GDR as a socialist. If Becker considered his Jewishness and Germanness to be largely social or discursive constructions, he had made the conscious, intellectual decision to become a socialist and thus felt he exerted a greater degree of control over this part of his identity. Party membership offered Becker a tangible point of political identification and he took this membership very seriously. It is in the context of his identity as a socialist that Becker makes his first reference to the GDR as his 'homeland' when he joined the army fully convinced that his country needed him (Zipser 1978: 408). Elaborating in a later interview on his reasons for joining the army Becker explained that at the time he was a 'politisch interessiertes Wesen' with a desire to be part of a worthwhile project (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 108). These two quotations show just how closely linked Becker's political identity and sense of *Heimat* were and demonstrates also that this socialist identity was defined almost exclusively in positive terms.

For many writers and intellectuals this fundamental loyalty to their state and Party was founded in genuine ideological conviction and further emphasised by the presence of West Germany representing what Friedrich Dieckmann described as 'das sichernde Antisystem'. (cited in Emmerich 1996: 463) We have already seen that the comparatively higher standards of living and greater levels of freedom in the Federal Republic were a source of much discontent amongst East Germans who longed for such luxuries themselves. Yet simultaneously the rampant consumerism and social problems this brought with it in the West (something which formed an integral part of East German propaganda) combined with the relative impotence of the permitted political dissent there confirmed for many intellectuals their socialist conviction and loyalty to the SED. This sentiment was further reinforced by the banning of the Communist Party in the West in 1956. Jan Faktor (1996: 2), a Czech author who lived in the GDR from the 1970s, describes his East Berlin friends as having 'an unquestioning faith which was unmistakable and unique to them'. For Faktor, this faith 'drew strength from the fact that those people one knew personally in the West were also unable to influence events and that they were also unhappy'. Hence Faktor argues:

> the faith of the GDR Left did not just grow in a vacuum as some kind of illusion. It also grew on the basis of hard information; the Left over there was real and alive (how realistic it was, is another matter entirely). This had particular consequences for the "East": it could easily cause people to develop a particular form of blindness [...]. The (imperialist) part of reality which one wanted to do battle with, and which went a long way towards justifying one's own theories and counter-visions, was situated beyond the border. (Faktor 1996: 2-3)

The presence of the West with all its shortcomings and ideological failings presented a common enemy against which intellectuals and politicians could unite, rendering internal disagreements comparatively trivial. Even the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 did not create as much disillusionment as one might have expected, as many intellectuals accepted it as necessary and hoped it would lead to an easing of other restrictions.[65] Similarly, the political importance given to literature in the GDR created a necessarily close professional relationship between authors and the political elite responsible for developing and implementing cultural policy. Indeed, when reviewing Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* for the *FAZ* in 1990, the critic Frank Schirrmacher commented that Wolf had 'wie viele Intellektuelle ihrer Generation ein familiäres, fast intimes Verhältnis zu ihrem Staat und seinen Institutionen aufgebaut'. (cited in Emmerich 1996: 465) This relationship between author and state was so close in the GDR, argued Günter Kunert, 'that the GDR would have collapsed much earlier without their having constantly legitimised it'. (cited in Bullivant 1994: 91) While this close relationship certainly existed for many writers in the early years of the GDR, such retrospective criticism overlooks the fact that for most intellectuals, including Becker, this strong sense of loyalty and political commitment was destroyed years before the collapse of the GDR with the violent crushing of the Prague Spring.

The move towards liberalisation in Czechoslovakia under the leadership of Alexander Dubček in early 1968 offered hope to many within the Soviet bloc and beyond who had become disillusioned with the reality of communism. The Prague Spring showed that 'liberalizers were admitting that communist rule had failed to solve many of society's problems, and had created new ones in the process'. (Williams 1997: 13) Unsurprisingly, these reformist, democratic ideas were not welcomed in Moscow or by the regimes of other Soviet bloc countries, who perceived the Czechoslovak liberals as potential threats to

[65] See section 2.1 for various intellectuals' responses to the building of the Wall.

their own power. In August of that year, a Soviet-led military invasion of Czechoslovakia (including tanks and troops from the GDR, Poland and Hungary) overthrew the liberal government and installed a more reliable regime in its place, but not without high cost to the Soviet Union, as Williams shows (1997: 113): 'Over the long run, the invasion did reconsolidate Soviet suzerainty, but inflicted irreparable damage on the international communist movement [...] and convinced many politicians, thinkers, and citizens throughout the bloc that the Soviet model could not be reformed, only overthrown.'

For Becker too the first seeds of doubt in his political identity were sown at this time and although he remained a member of the SED at this time, he claimed that his basis of loyalty towards the Party had been destroyed by the GDR's participation in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Indeed, there is a marked difference in the tone of his texts written before and after this event. While much of Becker's very early writing, such as his cabaret work, is critical of the SED and its policies, it is often in a jocular, tongue-in-cheek manner. Although this is, of course, an integral feature of the medium of cabaret, there is nothing in any of Becker's work produced before 1968 that echoes the bleakness of his later work. Becker's own socialist convictions were closely in line with those expressed in the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia. Becker too advocated a more humanist approach to communism with a stronger emphasis on the rights of the individual and on freedom of expression, something which was evident from his time as a student when he had worked as part of a farming collective during the holidays. However, while the military crushing of the Prague Spring put paid to any hopes Becker had that SED leaders might adopt a similar programme of reform at that time, he was initially encouraged by the accession of Honecker as leader of the SED with his promises of 'no taboos' in cultural policy. Progress made in the context of détente with the West in the early 1970s with the GDR finally receiving full international recognition of its status as an independent state was a further cause for optimism.

Previously Becker had kept his disputes with the Party relatively private, feeling it would be in some way improper of him to air his grievances in public. Instead Becker used his literature and the official forums of Party meetings and the *Schriftstellerverband* to express his political opinions and, as we saw earlier, to define his personal and professional identities in relation to his social surroundings. As Mary Fulbrook (1997: 31) has shown, 'élite groups were relatively united and lacking in any outwardly visible factional splits which might have provided the political space, the "opportunity structure",

for exploitation by dissent from below'. However, after the Prague Spring Becker recognised the opportunities for debate offered by Party and union meetings as nothing more than 'eine Art Ventil' which were completely ineffective on any practical level (Arnold 1992: 9) and he became increasingly more outspoken.

The 1970s emerge as a period of political uncertainty for Becker. A major focus of his first novel of the decade, *Irreführung der Behörden*, is the process of coming to terms with the disillusionment of an ideal and the novel is deliberately left open-ended. It is clearly stating that many things still hang in the balance, but that nothing is yet hopeless for Becker. Similarly, while Becker came under increased pressure in the form of disciplinary action in both the Party and the *Schriftstellerverband* and under stricter *Stasi* surveillance in the mid-1970s, he retained a degree of political acceptability. By 1976, when the 'Biermann affair' erupted, Becker had been able to publish both *Irreführung der Behörden* and *Der Boxer* (although the former only just made it) and had finally seen *Jakob der Lügner* made into a film. Further, he was permitted numerous trips to the West, was elected to the committee of the *Schriftstellerverband* and received the 1975 *Nationalpreis der DDR*. Although Becker was undoubtedly granted some privileges because of his status as a well-known author, such gestures also represent a genuine belief on the part of the authorities that Becker was someone they could continue to work with.

Becker's protest at the enforced expatriation of his friend Wolf Biermann led him to be expelled from both the SED and the executive of the *Schriftstellerverband*, from which he later resigned. In *Schlaflose Tage*, which Becker completed before leaving the GDR in 1977, we see a fundamental reassessment of his political identity, both in relation to communism and to GDR socialism. The novel reads as a political tirade against the SED and its actually existing socialism. The speed at which it was written lends the text an urgent feel and renders it rather unsophisticated in comparison to the quality Becker had previously displayed in his writing. The message is quite clear, however: Becker no longer harboured any hope that the SED could reform its brand of socialism.

Becker's first literary output after he moved to the West, *Nach der ersten Zukunft*, continues this criticism of the SED as he attempts to distance himself from it and its policies. A satirical piece 'Ansprache vor dem Kongreß der unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen' confirms Becker's identity as a socialist, albeit with more moderate political aspirations, while emphatically announcing the end of his relationship to the SED and the *Schriftstellerverband*. Moreover, Becker is quite clear that he sees this severance as a

progressive, positive step. His attempts at defining his political identity in the West, however, are distinctly less successful. In the depoliticised post-*Tendenzwende* literary discourse of the late 1970s and 1980s, Becker is unable to find any positive political reference point with which he can identify.

Although the early 1980s saw a slight revival in the political commitment of literary discourse, this focused not on specifically West German issues, but on wider problems such as the critical state of international relations and the Peace Movement. Becker was initially involved in meetings supporting the Peace Movement with other writers from East and West Germany, but, along with other GDR dissidents, was excluded from a later collaborative meeting organised by the West for fear of offending the East German authorities. This exclusion from a single event symbolised a wider problem Becker experienced in the West, namely that he was still seen as a East German trouble-maker, bracketed in the same group as dissidents such as Wolf Biermann. In *Aller Welt Freund* this sense of isolation is thematised. The novel's protagonist, Kilian, fails in his attempt to commit suicide after his job as a current affairs journalist has driven him to the depths of despair and confusion. Kilian's editor recognises he is unable to cope with the misery and bleakness of the news he reports every day and moves him to a less demanding position in the sports journalism section in an act of kindness. This move is reminiscent of the transition in Becker's own own political involvement from prominent dissident, or political commentator, in the late 1970s to the state of confusion and political dislocation he was experiencing five years later.

It was only with the dawn of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union in 1985 under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev that Becker was able to engage once again in political discourse. After his bitter disillusionment with socialism as it was practised in the GDR, Becker recognised in Gorbachev someone who was expressing his idea of socialism and who, through his work towards ending Russia's Arms Race with the USA, shared his very real fears of war. In his essay 'Auf- und Abrüstung', written six months after Gorbachev and Reagan failed to reach any compromise on disarmament at the Reykjavik summit, Becker praises Gorbachev and harshly criticises the West for its refusal to make concessions regarding nuclear weapons.

On a domestic level, Gorbachev sought to create a more open and genuine democracy with more emphasis on the individual's needs and rights. For Mark Sandle (1999: 381) this 'turn towards the human being as an individual, as an active subject in the

historical process, can be seen as the start of the reaction against the dehumanizing, alienating aspects of neo-Stalinist state socialism'. As *glasnost* gave people the confidence to speak out it played a crucial part both in rallying early support from ordinary citizens for the reforms and in creating the popular participation and initiative necessary for a democracy. Such a shift in the leadership 'had profound implications for Soviet society. Toleration of pluralism, and a broader scope for debate signified a move towards a genuinely public sphere of civic awareness and resurrection of public morality, and formed the basis for a healthy democracy'. (Sandle 1999: 382) This new participatory approach of a truly democratic socialism was something Becker was able to identify with and transcended any notions of socialism he had encountered in the two Germanys.

However, Gorbachev became increasingly unpopular in the Soviet Union, where the population did not regard its new found political freedom as sufficient compensation for the continuing economic problems. By the time Gorbachev had come to power, the Soviet (planned) economy had already stagnated and in was desperate need of reform, something which began in earnest with the 1987 Law on State Enterprises. (Sandle 1999: 394) This effectively allowed for a mixed economy, ruled by a compromise of central planning and market forces, yet this compromise failed badly. The centrally planned economy continued to crumble with a lack of sufficient private enterprise to replace it and the situation became so severe that it swiftly led to shortages of consumer goods and food rationing. Popular support for Gorbachev dwindled and at the end of 1991 he resigned his presidency of the Soviet Union, which then ceased to exist, and Boris Yeltsin assumed leadership of the new Russian government.

For Becker, the demise of the Soviet Union constituted a great ideological blow, seemingly more so than the demise of the GDR almost two years earlier. He had chosen to remain detached from the debate on the prospect of East German reform when this had still seemed a possibility although he had spoken out against the public euphoria created by German unification. Even before the fall of the Berlin Wall Becker had pessimistically claimed that although he still held socialism to be a vastly superior social system to capitalism, he no longer saw it as practical in reality. So while Becker did not mourn the demise of GDR socialism as it had existed, the possibilities for alternative systems its very existence had presented now ceased to exist too. For over a decade while living in the West, Becker had defined his socialist identity not only in terms of his antipathy towards his capitalist surroundings, but also as in opposition to the SED regime. With the collapse

of the GDR this position was now destabilised and he admitted in 1992 that the events of the last few years had caused him unprecedented levels of confusion.

In some aspects it would appear that Becker never fully recovered from this political disorientation. In his 1994 television series on German unification, *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk,* Becker criticises the process of German unification and portrays prominent political attitudes of the time through a varied cast of characters. However, the tone is somewhat resigned, the majority of the characters, from East and West, do not have any strong political convictions or beliefs, just a vague notion that they are not as well off as they used to be. The sense of disillusionment on the part of Becker is reflected in the characters' political apathy and, in keeping with the views he expressed in his 1989 essay 'Ist der Sozialismus am Ende?', the series seems to represent a reappraisal of Becker's earlier political optimism. It is clear that Becker now sees his earlier view of socialist conviction in the GDR as overly optimistic and unrealistic as the East German characters in the series eagerly embrace capitalism at the first available opportunity. Moreover, *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk* does not offer any new political insights from Becker. It simply laments the fact that all the positive aspects of GDR socialism have been abolished alongside the negative aspects, that the unified Germany was not willing to adopt a more socialist course. After Becker's earlier polemical outbursts and forceful delivery of political texts, this series shows the extent of Becker's political disenchantment and resignation.

4.2 Early Political Convictions

4.2.1 Eine gesunde Einstellung zur DDR

Jurek Becker described his father, Max Becker, as 'a completely unpolitical person. Naturally he hated the fascists, and naturally he felt sympathetic toward the Communists. [...] But behind this sympathy and antipathy were no political convictions, no ideological beliefs, just personal experience'. (Zipser 1978: 408) Becker portrays this apolitical attitude in the fictional fathers in *Der Boxer* and *Bronsteins Kinder*, where Aron and Arno show no interest in their political surroundings as long as they do not feel threatened by them. However, as a child Becker was not aware of such subtleties and just as his father had taught him to mistrust all Germans, the young Becker understood from his father only that the Soviets and their systems of governance were inherently good. '[Mein Vater] ist in

Auschwitz von der Sowjetarmee befreit worden, und das waren dann für den Rest seines Lebens die Guten, die Heilsbringer. Mit diesem Hintergrund bin ich von ihm erzogen worden.' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 108) This attitude was by no means unusual for survivors of the Holocaust. In his memoirs *Erwachsenenspiele*, published in 1997, Günter Kunert describes his Jewish mother's politics in similar terms. As Kunert's father was German, he and his mother managed to escape deportation but witnessed how one by one their vast circle of family members and acquaintances were arrested. Very few returned after the war. Kunert writes: 'Meine Mutter besucht politische Versammlungen und tritt in die KPD ein, mit der Erklärung, die Kommunisten wären immer die entschiedensten Kämpfer gegen Hitler gewesen.' (Kunert 1999: 91)

If Becker was influenced by his father's belief in the inherent goodness of the Soviets, so too his early socialist stance was every bit as lacking in conviction as that of his father. Becker's early allegiance to communism was based not on ideological commitment, but was a reaction against fascism. While this was a common sentiment immediately after the war as the full extent of the horrors of the Third Reich were becoming clear, it was a particularly prominent attitude amongst the victims of fascism, as the above quotation from Kunert demonstrates.

At the age of 14 Becker joined the FDJ, primarily at the insistence of his father (Gilman 2002: 53) and later admitted that a further motivation for joining had been to fit in, to gain acceptance from his peers. 'Ich wollte durchschnittliche Sitten und Verhaltensformen entwickeln, so unauffällig wie möglich.' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 109) Becker further claimed to be unaware of undergoing any kind of political training at this age:

> I can't say I experienced any sort of organized political education at this stage, either at home or at school. I read a lot. Good books and bad, anything I could get my hands on; no one laid down any rules about it. Insofar as literature itself is political, I was of course politically influenced. But I can't say I was aware of it happening, and because my choice of books was so arbitrary, one influence often cancelled another out. Thus I can't really speak of a political education during this time. (Zipser 1978: 408)

In fact, Becker's choice of reading was determined largely by the socialist realist texts on the school syllabus and by the books available to him in his father's collection, which ranged from Edgar Wallace through Jean-Paul Sartre to Russian classics such as Gogol,

Dostoyevsky and Gorky. Becker's father always encouraged him to read, not just 'important' literature but also trivial books. (Gilman 2002: 63)

So despite these claims of leading an apolitical childhood, it is hardly surprising that Becker grew up prepared to commit himself to the socialist cause. Like others of his generation, his socialism grew from a combination of an emotional reaction to the past and informed decision making. Becker was brought up to believe that a hatred of fascism was synonymous with an allegiance with communism, while inclusion in social collectives such as the FDJ offered him an opportunity to transcend the historical differences between him and his peers. By engaging in political activity on this level, he was working towards a common future that had nothing to do with his past. Indeed, in his final school report of June 1955 Becker was highly praised: 'Georg ist seit 1951 Mitglied der FDJ. Seine gesellschaftliche Arbeit ist sehr gut. Er setzt sich in jeder Hinsicht für unsere Ziele ein.' (AdK, JBA, 464) In the same month Becker became a candidate of the SED and a full member in September of that year. 'I took this membership seriously and tried to do what the statutes required of me.' (Zipser 1978: 410) For Becker, membership of the Party represented official validation and a more tangible expression of his identity as a socialist and further confirmed the GDR as his political *Heimat*. At this time Becker also chose to spend two years in the *Kasernierte Volkspolizei* (KVP) although he could have gone straight to university after school. Talking later about this time Becker remembers: 'Das Wichstigste für mich als politisch interessiertes Wesen war wohl mein Empfinden, an einer Unternehmung beteiligt zu sein, die ich für lohnend hielt.' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 108). This commitment from Becker was recognised by the authorities. The earliest document in Becker's *Stasi* files from May 1957 is in response to a request for general information on Becker. The report is extremely positive. 'Im Wohngebiet beteiligt er sich gesellschaftlich und hat besonders bei der Vorbereitung der Wahl mitgeholfen. Von den Befragten wird er als der einzige positive Mensch aus dem Haus [...] bezeichnet. [...] Georg Becker habe eine gesunde Einstellung zur DDR.' (BStU MfS – BdL Idok 006006)

Ironically, it was Becker's decision, based on loyalty to the GDR and SED, to join the KVP that first prompted him to question the authorities:

> Soon it seemed that each day was comprised of a long series of useless and superfluous tasks, at least a great part of them were. Whenever I tried to talk about it, it was made crystal clear that it wasn't my job to worry about it. [...] Perhaps it was here that I first learned how to think; for thinking was the only way to overcome that intellectual

boredom now and then. (Zipser 1978: 409)

Nevertheless, Becker began a philosophy degree in 1957 full of optimism and 'the feeling that studying philosophy could somehow sharpen my mind, my capacity to think clearly'. (Zipser 1978: 410) Becker wanted to engage with 'systems of thought and values that I otherwise never would have encountered. And it is not totally unimportant to me that I became what is known as a Marxist during this time'. (Zipser 1978: 410) Indeed, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Becker, by his own admission not a particularly good student, engaged in some detail with Marxist theory. His archive at the *Akademie der Künste* contains essays he wrote at university with titles such as 'Marx über die Bedeutung der hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie' and 'Der marxistische Begriff der Kausalität und des Determinismus'. However, the more Becker explored these theories and the more he read in general, the more estranged he became from the purpose of his studies and from the way socialism was practised in the GDR. 'Ich weiß nicht ob das eine Art Naturgesetz ist, aber Leser werden relativ kritische Leute. Als Vielleser ist mir aufgefallen, daß einige der vorgegebenen Ziele des gesellschaftlichen Unternehmens DDR wenig mit der Praxis zu tun hatten.' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 110) Whereas Becker's socialist identity had always been firmly aligned to official discourse, here for the first time he begins to define it in more personal and independent terms.

As an example here Becker cites the move in the late 1950s in the GDR to collectivise farming operations. 'Ich hatte bei Marx und Engels gelesen, daß die Egoismen der Privateigentümer zu überwinden seien, und war überzeugt, daß es sich dabei um ein außerordentlich nützliches und ehrbares Ziel handelte.' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 110) Along with fellow students, Becker was given the task of trying to convince individual farmers they should form a *Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft* (LPG), yet when he witnessed the intimidation and pressure that the farmers were subjected to, he left, deciding that this was not something he wanted to be a part of. On his return Becker faced not only disciplinary action from the Party, but also an oral exam. He had received a list of thirty questions which he could be asked in the exam and which he was expected to prepare in advance. Certain that he would be asked about the theory of collective farming, Becker prepared and subsequently delivered a brilliant answer on this topic:

> Auch der Professor [...] blieb nicht unbeeindruckt. Doch als er fertig war, sagte er: "Sagen Sie, wie kommt es, daß Sie theoretisch diese Materie offenbar beherrschen, während Sie in der Praxis nicht in der Lage sind, Ihre Erkenntnisse auch anzuwenden?"

> [...] Ich zog den Zettel mit den Fragen aus der Tasche und sagte, die Frage, die er mir eben gestellt hatte, stehe nicht unter den dreißig Fragen, und deswegen sei ich auch darauf nicht vorbereitet. Das trug mir das nächste Parteiverfahren ein wegen Unverschämtheit gegenüber Angehörigen des Lehrkörpers. (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 111)

Despite the humour of this story, Becker was finding university increasingly difficult due to the amount of trouble he frequently found himself in. In the summer of 1960 he left university to pursue a course in script writing at the film school in Babelsberg, but had he not chosen to leave, it had already been determined that he would effectively be expelled anyway: the deputy director of the Humboldt University's philosophy institute had decided that Becker should take a break from his studies to work in a factory, building a better relationship to workers and to GDR socialism. Becker's return to his studies was to be conditional on a satisfactory report from his production colleagues. (BStU MfS 19996/63)

4.2.2 Liegt det an den Affen? Early Subversive Texts

Notwithstanding the continuing tensions Becker was experiencing with the SED, he remained committed to the Party, in public at least, for eight years after his *de facto* expulsion from university:

> Es folgten viele Auseinandersetzungen, immer auf der Basis einer grundlegenden Loyalität. Es wäre mir nie eingefallen, in die Welt hinauszuposaunen, daß diese Leute Lumpen sind und daß es unmöglich ist, sich so zu verhalten, wie die Partei es tat. Auf diese Weise ging es ziemlich lange: Ärger, Meinungsverschiedenheiten über Einzelheiten, dabei auch über wichtige – aber all das immer mit einem grundlegenden Einverständnis. (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 110)

So while Becker's disagreements with the Party continued to be numerous and occasionally serious, they did not cause him to doubt his allegiance to the SED. Even the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 did not present any fundamental problems for Becker. At this time he was primarily writing texts for the *Distel* cabaret. While these texts are clearly critical of the Party, their tone is jocular and rather tongue-in-cheek in comparison to Becker's later texts. Many are written in Berlin dialect, lending the texts a familiar feel and simultaneously softening the critical content. The most scathing piece by far is a text entitled *Bundesratssitzung Morgen* and here the target is West Germany: a group of West German politicians sit around a table grumbling that they have had to sever

diplomatic relations with all but three countries as the others have chosen to officially recognise the GDR as an independent state. One member of the group suggests the only solution is that they too recognise the GDR but is told: 'Ihr Vorschlag wäre überhaupt kein Ausweg. Wir könnten doch schlecht die Beziehung zu uns selber abbrechen.' Most of the men are in fact straw dolls who periodically topple off their seats. The second scene of this piece is set in the offices of a West German newspaper called 'Freie Freiheit'. Although it is only 10 April, reporters are already composing articles about 1 May demonstrations in the GDR, inventing spontaneous protest speeches which are quickly crushed by military power. The implication, of course, is that the media in the democratic FRG is subject to political pressures to produce expedient propaganda. (AdK, JBA, 75)

The earliest of these cabaret texts, performed at the *Distel* in December 1960, is 'Die aktuelle Umfrage'. It features a reporter standing in a busy street, asking people if they sleep with the bedroom window open. It is the 316th such survey to be conducted. The audience at home is encouraged to write in with their answers. 'Der erste Preis ist, wie könnte es anders sein, eine zehnjährige Chinareise!' (AdK, JBA, 74) This is a possible echo of the fact that Becker himself once received a three-week study trip to the USSR as a reward for his excellent conduct in the KVP. (Gilman 2002: 63) Amongst Becker's other cabaret texts is a piece called 'Kein Handicap' (AdK, JBA, 81) about a blind photographer trying to convince his doctor to give him a clean bill of health in order that he can carry on working. The doctor initially refuses then relents when the photographer explains that his blindness really isn't a problem because the quality of the paper and printing is so bad that every picture comes out as a black square in the end anyway.

Some pieces go a step further in that they are directly critical of certain government policies. One example here is 'Der Kabarettplan' (AdK, JBA, 76), which satirises the inflexible long term economic plans in the GDR. A cabaret director and script writer discuss the benefits of a strictly regulated society with fixed economic plans and bemoan the difficulties they face in cabaret and theatre in having to make their own decisions. While they face uncertain futures, they complain, the 'Durchschnittsbürger' can easily see the social improvements the strict regluations have brought about and which will improve his quality of life. 'Weiterhin ist mir aufgefallen, daß keine Industriewaren mehr verkauft werden, für die es nicht mindestens solange Garantie gibt, bis man den Laden verlassen hat.' One text, 'Affenkundig', features a man with his son at the zoo, peering into the

monkey enclosure. The young boy asks his father a string of questions about how the monkeys live and what they eat. The piece ends:

> Kind: Ick möchte ooch 'ne Banane
>
> Vater: Det jibt aba keene
>
> Kind: Liegt det an den Affen?
>
> Vater fragt das Publikum: Wat soll ick dem Jungen daruff nu antworten?' (AdK, JBA, 73)

While all of these texts are critical of the SED and its policies, they clearly support Becker's claims that the numerous disagreements he had with the Party at this point did not rupture the fundamental loyalty he felt towards the SED and thus his commitment 'an einer Unternehmung beteiligt zu sein, die ich für lohnend hielt'. (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 108) Within the medium of cabaret it is to be expected that most texts carry a subversive or satirical message. Moreover, the relatively small audience sizes meant that any explicit criticism made of the government reached far fewer people than it would via other media such as film or literature. The critical content of these texts is softened by the humorous, tongue-in-cheek content and thus they can be seen as representing Becker's keen interest and engagement in his political environment rather than as overt criticisms of the state.

4.2.3 Limited Political Dissent in *Jakob der Lügner*

Although *Jakob der Lügner* is most commonly treated by critics as a Jewish novel for the reasons I have indicated in Chapter One, the book is also significant for its political content, most clearly depicted in the theme of resistance. At a symposium on 'Literature and Moral Philosophy'[66] in 1983, Becker gave a paper explaining why he had chosen to omit any portrayal of active resistance from the novel: 'Ever since I have been able to think, I have been preoccupied with the question why the resistance against Jewish extermination – I mean the Jewish resistance, the resistance of the victims – was so unbelievably small.' (Becker 1983b: 270) In fact, the only significant display of resistance in any Jewish ghetto was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the spring of 1943 and Becker considered it inappropriate to cite this uprising as if it were at the beginning of a long list of many. 'This instance was unprecedented and unique. It was more a big exception than an example.' (Becker 1983b: 271) Thus Becker was quite clear that the lack of resistance

[66] Held at the University of Toronto, Canada, April 14-17, 1983.

in *Jakob* was intentional and, as Chloe Paver (1999: 119) has also shown, was reacting against 'what he saw as a regrettable post-war vogue for resistance narratives'.

Two leading examples of this resistance literature which was so celebrated in the GDR are Anna Seghers's *Das siebte Kreuz*, (1942) written in exile in Mexico, about a group of seven men who escape from a concentration camp before the start of the war, and Bruno Apitz's *Nackt unter Wölfen* (1958), where prisoners in Buchenwald risk their lives saving a three-year-old child and then, under the direction of an illegal communist leadership, organise a successful uprising and liberate the camp before the American army arrives.[67] For Becker, such literature detracted from the wider truth that there was little effective resistance and he saw a danger that people would begin to believe in this fictitious resistance rather than face up to the historical reality. 'The reasons are obvious. It is more pleasing to believe that victims defend themselves; it is more pleasing to believe that injustice has a hard time succeeding [...] Come today to Germany and listen around – you would think that Hitler stood alone in the pasture.'[68] (Becker 1983b: 271) The double ending of *Jakob* is clearly intended to subvert this notion and the *genre* of literature that perpetuated it. The unmistakable irony of the distant rumble of Soviet artillery bearing down magnificently on the ghetto just moments after Jakob is shot trying to escape is juxtaposed with the bleak, 'true' ending of the Jews being transported to a death camp. That the Red Army fails to arrive in time for Jakob and his fellow sufferers serves to remind us that it equally failed to liberate the inhabitants of a single ghetto during the war.

For Oliver Sill (1992: 75), the fact that the novel was published in East Germany represents a triumph over the censor there. 'Verborgen blieb der Zensur die Subversivität eines Werkes, die gegen jede Form repressiver staatlicher Machtansprüche gerichtet ist.' Indeed we have noted earlier how Becker chose to rewrite *Jakob* as a novel after work on the film of the same story was discontinued. Although the film ultimately collapsed due to the Polish production company engaged to make the film reneging on its contract, rather than as a result of East German censorship, there were political reservations about the film in GDR nevertheless. The *Babelsberg Studio für Spielfilme* wrote in its report on *Jakob* for the *Hauptverwaltung Film*:

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[67] Apitz was incarcerated in Buchenwald, where there was indeed armed and organised resistance against the Nazis. However, while the prisoners manage to free themselves in Apitz's novel, in reality the camp was liberated by American forces on 11 April 1945.

[68] This is a rather literal translation of the German here. A better alternative might be 'you would think Hitler didn't have single follower'.

> Bei der Wertung des ideologischen Gehalts des Buches wird die Frage aufgeworfen, ob die Beschränkung auf allgemein menschliche Ideale im antifaschistischen Themenbereich für die sozialistische Filmkunst zureichend ist. Die Teilnehmer der Diskussion stimmten darin überein, daß die Spezifik des sozialistischen Realismus, die in jedem Falle das Bekenntnis zum kämpferischen Humanismus und des wahren Verhältnisses zwischen Individuum und Gesellschaft und die Darstellung der gesellschaftlich vorwärtsweisenden Kräfte in sich einschließt, in der sozialistischen Filmkunst ihren Ausdruck finden muß – auch im Bereich der antifaschistischen Thematik (wie z.B. bei "Nackt unter Wölfen"). (SAPMO DR1/4266)

After the frustration Becker had faced in watching his most important film project to date come to nothing, his decision to write the story as a novel can be seen a political decision in itself, reacting against the repressive structures of cultural censorship in the GDR. Similarly, David Rock argues that along with the short story 'Die Mauer', whose very title 'suggests historical parallels between the GDR and the Nazi period', *Jakob* could lead the reader to draw similarities between the two regimes. 'In *Jakob der Lügner* and "Die Mauer", the watch-towers, the closely guarded barbed-wire ghetto-fences and walls, and not least the orders to shoot on sight evoke uncomfortable similarities with the state-borders of the GDR.' (Rock 2000a: 102)

Although there is certainly an element of truth to these analyses of *Jakob*, the subversive elements of the novel are ultimately peripheral issues compared to the originality of the main story of the novel. Censorship of literature in the GDR tended to be less strict than that of film primarily because films reached a far larger audience than novels. Books could also be effectively censored by only allowing tiny print runs to be published, further reducing a text's potential sphere of influence. When asked in interview if he had intended the novel to read as a parable of the writer in modern society, Becker replied that this had not been his intention but that he realised it had become a part of the story: 'in the special setting while I was writing this book I had this idea in the back of my mind. I didn't want to make it a very important part of the story, I didn't want to write special chapters about this theme, but I can say that I never lost sight of this possibility of understanding the story.' (Becker 1983c: 290) While Becker accepted this analysis of the novel, he denied that he had intended it to read as a specific allegory of his situation in the GDR. 'Ich glaube nicht, daß diese Geschichte intendiert war von einer DDR-Situation, in der ich mich befand.' (Arnold: 1992: 6) This claim was supported by Frank Beyer, who directed the DEFA version of *Jakob* when it was filmed in 1974. 'Wenn man sich

anstrengt, kann man den Film natürlich as Allegorie [für die DDR] verstehen, aber tatsächlich haben wir den Film nicht gemacht, um ein Abbild der DDR zu liefern.' (Boyer & Dueck 2003) Hence while it seems valid to claim that Becker did experience some political frustrations with the authorities in the GDR, they were at this early stage of minimal importance to his work and certainly secondary to personal and aesthetic concerns. Even comparatively serious disputes with the Party, such as those leading to him breaking off his studies, were all conducted 'immer mit einem grundlegenden Einverständnis'. (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 110)

4.3 Eine Zeit ständiger Nerverei und Zeterei

4.3.1 Die Loyalitätsbasis wurde angeschlagen

The basis for this fundamental sense of loyalty was dealt a serious blow by the GDR's participation in the military suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968. It was at this time that Becker, who less than a decade earlier had been described in a *Stasi* report as the only positive resident in his house and as having a healthy attitude towards the GDR, became openly critical of the regime. While Becker continued to experience disputes and differences of opinion with the SED on a variety of matters during the years following his expulsion from university, we have seen that he was content to debate these issues in private, feeling it inappropriate to discuss such problems in public. However, even before the GDR's military intervention in Prague, Becker was beginning to have doubts about the effectiveness of Party meetings as a discussion forum. 'Irgendwann tauchte bei mir dann der Verdacht auf, daß die Möglichkeit, in der Parteiversammlung über alles zu streiten, als eine Art Ventil erfunden worden ist.' (Arnold 1992: 9) The Soviet bloc countries' invasion of Czechoslovakia reinforced this suspicion and brought about the end of Becker's loyalty to the SED. 'Die Loyalitätsbasis [...] wurde im Jahr 1968 angeschlagen oder sogar zertrümmert. Als die Warschauer-Pakt-Staaten in Prag einmarschierten, schien mir das nicht etwas zu sein, das mit einem bißchen guten Willen zu schlucken war.' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 112) As Becker made this comment with the benefit of hindsight, it is possibly rather exaggerated, but there is certainly no doubt that this was the first real point of disenchantment in his political relationship with the GDR.

Becker was not alone in experiencing such a caesura in his relationship with the SED. Many authors, particularly of the younger generation such as Thomas Brasch and

Jürgen Fuchs, clashed fundamentally with the SED as a result of the end of the Prague Spring. This younger generation of authors had been brought up to follow and believe in the achievability of democratic socialism. For them, the Prague Spring represented an attempt to realise the goals expressed in this ideology, while the intervention that ended it was clearly a triumph of military force over democracy. Thomas Brasch protested so severely against the invasion that he was punished with one year's imprisonment. Similarly, the military action was crucial for Jürgen Fuchs judgement of the GDR. 'Up until then, he had thought, "OK, the GDR might not be as democratic as the West, but at least the Soviet countries did not go around invading other countries." This belief was shattered by his experience of the Soviet bloc armies' invasion of Czechoslovakia to ice the Prague Spring.' (Torpey 1995: 62) Another author of Becker's generation, Reiner Kunze, turned in his Party membership card in protest and subsequently came under *Stasi* observation. At this time the *Stasi* also redoubled their surveillance efforts with regard to Becker as part of the wider move to bring the GDR's entire culture industry under observation. The fact that so many authors and intellectuals had spoken out in protest against the GDR's part in the military repression of the Prague Spring was a key factor in the decision to establish in 1969 *Hauptabteilung* XX/7 of the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, a department responsible solely for intelligence relating to those involved in the cultural sphere. Also among the first subjects of this new department's *Operative Vorgänge* as a result of their critical stance regarding the Prague Spring were Wolf Biermann and Stefan Heym, whose unpublished novel *Der Tag X*[69] criticised the role of the Party in the 1953 unrest. Both writers had been heavily criticised for their dissident standpoints at the SED's Central Committee plenary session in December 1965. (Reid 1990: 36)

As we saw earlier in this chapter, the first *Stasi* reports on Becker were overwhelmingly favourable and commended his positive attitude towards the GDR and his willingness to support its politics. However, after 1968 there is a marked change in Becker's attitude and a *Stasi* report from July 1969 remarks that Becker appears to have adopted a more subversive stance towards the SED: 'Bekanntlich ist der B. Mitglied der SED. Nach Ansicht des IM bestehen bei dem B. nicht nur politisch-ideologische Unklarheiten; vielmehr versucht er in versteckter Form zu hetzen.' (BStU MfS AP 5682/82) Another report written a month later notes that Becker has begun to make

[69] Eventually published as *5 Tage im Juni* in 1974 in West Germany.

derisive comments about the Party. 'Nach aussenhin soll B. fortschrittlich auftreten, jedoch im engeren Kreis spricht er gegen Partei und Regierung (macht diese lächerlich).' (BStU MfS – BDL Idok 006006) Moreover, Becker seemed prepared to bring this criticism of the SED into the open, as in September 1969 the *Stasi's OV "Lügner"* file observes that Becker had refused to propose one of his close friends (presumably Manfred Krug) as an SED candidate. 'Wörtlich soll er ausgeführt haben, daß er das seinem besten Freund nicht antun könne.' The report continues:

> Es ist bekannt [...], daß der Jurek B. gegenüber unserem Staat, insbesonders gegenüber unserer Kunstpolitik eine negative bis feindliche Haltung einnimmt, die sich nicht mit seiner Mitgliedschaft in der SED verträgt. [...] Der IM verstand die erhaltene Information so, daß der Jurek B.
>
> - andere Künstler vom Beitritt zur SED abzuhalten sucht und
> - sich selbst nicht bei seinen gleichgesinnten "Oppositionellen" durch eine solche Bürgerschaft in "Mißkredit" zu bringen wünscht.

The party which had hitherto been the physical representation of Becker's ideological beliefs and which had given him a sense of political affinity had become an object of scorn and derision.

4.3.2 Irreführung der Behörden

Despite the severe damage Becker claimed the events of 1968 caused in his relationship with the SED, the first novel he wrote after this, *Irreführung der Behörden,* is not as bleak as one might expect and suggests that Becker may still have harboured some hopes that GDR socialism could be reformed. Although he never regained the affinity he had felt for the SED, Becker was reluctant at this stage to sever his relationship with the Party and was no doubt further encouraged by Honecker's speech in December of that year promising there would be no taboos for literature written from a socialist viewpoint and by the perceived move towards liberalisation with regard to cultural policy that followed.[70] It would appear that Becker was also viewed by the authorities as politically acceptable during this time. In 1972 Becker was approached by the *Stasi* with an offer to become an *IM,* an offer he rejected unequivocally (BStU MfS 17374/82 "Lügner" Band 3), but which nevertheless suggests he was still seen as loyal to the Party on some level. The professional

[70] See section 2.1 for a fuller discussion of this.

success Becker enjoyed in the 1970s and the fact that permission was finally granted for the original script of *Jakob der Lügner* to be filmed (it was duly completed and released in 1974) show that despite the political differences which existed between Becker and the Party, the cultural authorities still saw him fundamentally as someone they could work with.

However, the East German critics were not so positive in their views of Becker or their reviews of his second novel. After *Jakob der Lügner* which, despite some possible underlying subversive elements was primarily received as a Holocaust novel, *Irreführung der Behörden* was seen as being too subjective, ambiguous and lacking in substance. Writing in the *Ostsee-Zeitung* Walter Waldmann found the novel 'glatt, manchmal zu glatt' (cited in Gilman 2002: 118) while Klaus-Dieter Hähnel reviewing the book for the *Weimarer Beiträge* was considerably more scathing, describing it as 'problemblasse Selbstgefälligkeit' and 'ohne genügende Lebenssubstanz', leaving the reader essentially 'orientierungslos'. (cited in Manger 1981: 148) Hans Joachim Bernhard on the other hand, reviewing the book for *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, did not recognise the theme of conformity in the novel. He chose to interpret it as a warning against the evils of capitalism and against failing to use one's talents selflessly and productively in the interests of further developing a socialist society. By contrast, West German critics, such as Josef Quack of the *Frankfurter Hefte*, chose to read the novel primarily as a criticism of repressive GDR politics and thus were largely positive in their reviews. For Quack (1973: 593), the purpose of Gregor's stories is 'seine Sicht der gesellschaftlichen Dinge in leicht durchschaubarer Gestalt zu offenbaren' in order that the reader sees, for example, how the Party removes the rights of the individual one by one, represented in Gregor's story about a man whose teeth are removed after it is discovered they are made of a substance which could be of great benefit to society. Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1973: 25) interpreted the novel in similar terms for *Die Zeit* and describes it as a book which 'nicht unpolitisch sein konnte, weil hier alles Märchenhafte und Phantastische, alles Poetische [...] immer wieder konfrontiert wird mit der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit der DDR der sechziger Jahre'.

The new tension between hope and disenchantment that the Prague Spring precipitated in Becker's identification with GDR politics would seem to have caused a period of reflection and uncertainty for Becker, represented in *Irreführung der Behörden* where a key theme is that of coming to terms with disillusionment and loss of an ideal. This theme is problematised initially in the opening pages of the novel, where the

protagonist Gregor Bienek, a student and aspiring writer, is trying to sell his latest idea for a story to a publisher.[71] The tale is of a young man, Toni, who meets a girl named Rita on a tram and invites her to join him for an ice-cream. She agrees and suddenly they are living a fairy-tale existence – Toni leads Rita to a Cadillac parked next to the station and they drive away; later as they stroll down a leafy avenue he asks her to pick out the house she would like to live in and she points to a 'Barockschlößchen' that they just chance to be passing (IB: 10). Toni takes the key from his pocket and leads Rita into the house, she mentions her favourite food and it is waiting in the oven for them. Whatever Rita desires, even a tropical beach in the back garden or a gypsy entertainer, Toni's magic can provide. Gregor explains that he wants to tell a story 'in der sich ein junger Mann verliebt, und plötzlich geht es los wie im Märchen'. (IB: 11) However, Toni soon begins to suspect that Rita's interest lies less in him than in his magical abilities and the relationship temporarily collapses. After a brief affair with another girl, Toni realises that despite everything he still loves Rita and cannot be happy without her. Rita has reached a similar conclusion and the couple are reunited, but this time they live in Toni's actual house in a realistic world. With Rita, Toni finds this reality more beautiful than before and they are indeed happy together. This story can be read in political terms as analogous to GDR socialism of the early period. In their naivety Toni and Rita embrace an ideology wholeheartedly and with the expectations of miracles to be performed. Yet these expectations are too high to be fulfilled and the fairy tale imagery suggests that the ideals to which Toni and Rita aspired were, like GDR socialism's unfulfilled utopian promises, unrealistic from the outset.

Similarly, the title of the novel Gregor writes, 'Renovierung eines Luftschlosses', suggests coming to terms with disillusionment of an ideal. The inspiration for this story is a farmer (who becomes a Geography teacher in Gregor's novel) who came from the West to work on the *LPG* where Gregor completed his *Ernteeinsatz* as a student in 1960. Although by no means all of his expectations have been fulfilled, the farmer tells Gregor, he is on the whole happy with his decision and he would not do things differently if he had the chance. Both of these stories reflect the process Becker was going through himself at the time of writing *Irreführung der Behörden*, namely that of attempting to come to terms with his disillusionment in a positive manner and find a *Lebensstrategie* with which to continue. Although Gregor's stories are conceived of a decade before Becker wrote the

[71] There are many autobiographical parallels between Becker and Bienek, not least the fact that they are the same age and share the same initials. See sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.4 for a discussion of these parallels.

novel, it was not until 1968 that Becker experienced such disillusionment. The fact that he chooses to end *Irreführung* in 1967 is possibly indicative of his own confusion, suggesting that he is not sure how the novel, or the process of finding a positive *Lebensstrategie* for the future, should progress in post-1968 East Germany.

Becker's own disillusionment becomes clear in another of Gregor's stories, the 'Straßenbaugeschichte' about three would-be bank robbers who help build a motorway in order that they will have a fast escape route out of town for themselves and their loot and will be able to pass the city limits before the police are alerted to their crime.[72] This is based on an early film exposé with the title 'Ein Plan mit Haken', set in 1965 and dated by the *Akademie der Künste* as written in 1968. The exposé describes a warehouse employee, Alfred Winter, who leads a rather lonely existence with only a bird and various ingenious but essentially pointless machines of his own invention for company. Winter occupies his spare time writing anonymous letters to the warehouse director suggesting ways to improve efficiency and productivity at the warehouse, suggestions which are all thoroughly impractical or superfluous. Winter is particularly piqued after his letter on improving warehouse security is read out and ridiculed by the director and many colleagues at a staff meeting, so in order to prove his point, Winter decides to break into the warehouse (without stealing anything) then reveal himself as the letter writer. However, he realises he possesses neither the skills nor the nerves required to commit the crime and, after many failed attempts, finally manages to recruit three criminals to help him, promising them rich rewards. Here the story converges with that of Gregor's 'Straßenbaugeschichte', as Winter and his colleagues offer their services to the local authorities to assist on the town's long delayed motorway project. 'Ein Plan mit Haken' ends with the three criminals, much to Winter's fury, deciding not to go through with their plan, choosing instead the more rewarding path of going on to build the next road. The work has made honest men of them all. As a final irony, Winter arrives at work one morning just days before the warehouse is being relocated to find it has been burgled. He reminds the director that one of the anonymous letters had warned against this. The director is unconcerned – very little was stolen as most things had been moved to the new premises, he claims to have known all along the security was poor but it didn't seem worth investing in new security when they were due to move. Indeed, they would have moved months ago, he says, if only it hadn't taken so long to build the new road they needed to

[72] This story and that of Toni and Rita are discussed in some detail in section 2.2.2.

reach the new premises. This version of the story is clearly critical of Winter and portrays him as a rather pathetic figure. His desire for personal glory and lack of respect for authority are the causes of his ultimate downfall. The former criminals, on the other hand, have shown that through sheer toil they are able to reintegrate themselves into society.

It is surely a measure of Becker's own growing cynicism that in the 'Straßenbaugeschichte' version, written in *Irreführung der Behörden* after the Prague Spring (but set circa 1960), that this ending is depicted in negative terms. Gregor's original story ends with the three bank robbers successfully carrying out the robbery just days before the bank is relocated to more secure premises. The money is less than they had expected and they feel that after the hard work they put in on the motorway, they have earned every penny. It is Lola, Gregor's girlfriend, who suggests that the robbers shouldn't break into the bank 'weil sie Blut am ehrbaren Leben geleckt haben'. (IB: 150) Lola genuinely believes in the ideology she has learnt in the GDR and even uses such clichés to try to convince Gregor to adopt her version of the story. 'Arbeit verändert Menschen, daran glaubst du doch auch?' (IB: 150) When Gregor finally yields and adopts Lola's ending, it is not because he has been convinced by her argument, but an act of conformity. The pressure Lola exerts on him combined with the pressure to produce politically acceptable literature is enough to persuade Gregor to abandon his principles.

Gregor's stories in *Irreführung der Behörden*, which as we noted earlier are some of Becker's own texts which he had not been able to get into print, suggest that the early 1970s were a period of reassessment for Becker in terms of his political identity. The Prague Spring had shattered his affinity for and loyalty towards the SED and caused Becker to search for methods of coming to terms with this disillusionment which was most keenly represented in the shift from the idealistic ending of 'Ein Plan mit Haken' to the more cynical conclusion of 'Straßenbaugeschichte', the two versions of the story being written either side of the Prague Spring. Moreover, Gregor's acceptance of this idealistic ending is not based on conviction, but an act of conformity and Becker is thus portraying his earlier affinity to the SED as naïve and, by the time he writes the novel, untenable. Yet the other two stories discussed here, that of Toni and Rita and the 'Renovierung eines Luftschlosses', suggest a more positive acceptance of this disillusionment. Read together the stories reflect the uncertainty Becker hoped to depict within the novel as a whole. 'Ich habe versucht, beim Leser das Gefühl zu erwecken, als liefe der Prozeß noch, aber sei nichts verloren.' (Lübbe 1974: 525)

4.3.3 Schlaflose Tage

4.3.3.1 Meine Identität [hat sich] auf irgendeine Weise verändert

The event that finally signalled the end of this hope was the enforced expatriation of Wolf Biermann from the GDR in November 1976. Becker had been friends with Biermann for twenty years by this time and therefore had very personal reasons, along with a professional sense of outrage, for campaigning to the SED to reverse its decision to revoke Biermann's citizenship. Not only was Becker the first to declare himself willing to sign the letter of protest that subsequently caused political uproar amongst the GDR's cultural elite (Krug 1998: 9), he also tried, albeit without success, to collect signatures in support of Biermann at the DEFA studios where he was working at the time. (BStU MfS OV "Lügner", Band I) For Becker, this protest enabled him to give voice to all the political grievances he felt in the GDR and although his fury at the way Biermann was treated was genuine, Becker acknowledged any number of events could have triggered such a protest at this time: 'Ich weiß nicht, ob und wann mir das sonst geblüht hätte, aber sicher ist, daß es bei dieser Biermann-Sache um mehr als nur um diese eine konkrete Angelegenheit ging. Die Ausbürgerung Biermanns war wie der Funke, der in einen Heuhaufen fiel.' (Meyer-Gosau 1997: 112)

As a result of his protest at Biermann's expatriation and his refusal to apologise for it, Becker was expelled from the SED in 1976 after almost two decades of membership. The party leadership initially proposed 'Jurek Becker [...] aus den Reihen der Partei zu streichen', but at a meeting of the *Grundorganisation,* the members were so incensed by Becker's unrepentant stance, that a more severe punishment of 'Ausschluß' was proposed and passed by a majority of 114 to eight:[73]

> Genosse Becker hat für diese Protesterklärung Unterschriften gesammelt und sich persönlich aktiv für die Rückkehr Biermanns eingesetzt. Er ist nicht in der Lage, sein unparteimäßiges Verhalten zu revidieren. Er ist sich bewußt, daß er "andauernd mit der Parteidisziplin in Konflikt" gerate und bringt nicht den Willen auf, den mit der Mitgliedschaft verbundenen Pflichten nachzukommen. (Berbig *et al* 1994: 226)

[73] The former punishment of being struck from the Party lists would, theoretically, have allowed for Becker to reapply for SED membership in the future. The more severe measure of 'Ausschluß' meant a permanent exclusion from the Party for Becker.

Gerhard Wolf received the same punishment at the meeting, while other authors such as Stephan Hermlin, Sarah Kirsch and Volker Braun were also subject to disciplinary measures. In an interview years later, Becker described this as worse than having 'ein Stück Heimat weggenommen', not because he still felt any affinity for the SED, but because of his initial strength of conviction in GDR socialism. Becker explained that he had joined the SED 'weil ich an eine Unternehmung geglaubt habe, die ich damals für sehr sinnvoll hielt'. (Kammann 1992: 21) These comments illustrate not only what a fundamental role Becker's SED membership had played in constructing his identity as a socialist, but also how this identity in itself had enabled Becker to transcend socio-historical differences between him and his surroundings in order to develop an affinity to the GDR as his homeland.

When Becker offered his manuscript of *Leben in der Luft*, later to become *Schlaflose Tage*, to Hinstorff for publication in June 1977, he was the first of the thirteen signatories of the letter of protest at Biermann's expatriation to request permission to publish a text, and he approached this process more forcefully than ever before. Becker demanded an appraisal of the manuscript within four weeks, an initial print run of 50,000 – 70,000 and refused to change so much as a comma in the text. If these demands were met, Becker agreed to ensure that the novel appeared in the GDR before it was published by Suhrkamp in the West. The novel was officially rejected on grounds of its 'ungenügende[] Qualität' after a scathing in-house appraisal of the text: 'Zunächst fiel mir an diesem Manuskript die erstaunliche Unbeholfenheit der Sprache auf, danach eine nicht minder erstaunliche Unbedarftheit des Gedankens, und schließlich zeigte sich, daß die inhaltliche Dürftigkeit die unmittelbare Ursache der dürftigen Form ist.' (SAPMO DY30/85) Indeed, when compared to Becker's previous three novels, *Schlaflose Tage* does have some notable shortcomings. The characters are by no means as multi-faceted as in the earlier books and are often rather clichéd stereotypes. Moreover, dialogue in the text occasionally tends to slip into one character delivering a monologue or polemic, the political message seemingly more important than narrative continuity to Becker. Years later he was to admit that some of his banned work now seemed 'zu aufgeregt' (WS: 31) and attributes this defect to writing under censorship. 'Du kannst nicht anders. Du hast vergessen, daß Bücher etwas anders sind als Vehikel, um Ansichten darauf zu transportieren.' (WS: 32) Although Becker does not mention *Schlaflose Tage* by name, the criticisms he makes of some of his work would seem to apply to this novel here. Despite these self-confessed inadequacies in

the book, further *Stasi* reports clearly show *Schlaflose Tage* was banned 'weil der Autor eine einseitige Darstellung des Verhältnisses von Individuum und sozialistischer Gesellschaft gibt und der reale Sozialismus für einen moralisch bewußt lebenden Menschen als unannehmbar dargestellt wird.' (BStU MfS AP 2275/92). Although Becker continued to negotiate with Hinstorff over these key political points and agreed to change some of the most critical sentences of the novel, an editor's report complains that Becker simply rephrased these sentences and in a way that made them no less barbed than they had originally been. The report thus recommended that the novel should not be published.[74]

Another contributing factor to *Schlaflose Tage's* ban in the GDR, as Beate Müller (2003: 326) has also noted, was Becker's outspoken manner in the western media at this time. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, which Becker gave while initially waiting to hear whether *Schlaflose Tage* would be published or not, he reiterated this new, uncompromising approach and a refusal to behave tactically as he had done in the past. Becker explained, 'daß sich in den letzten sieben, acht Monaten meine Identität verändert hat'. (Rumler & Schwarz 1977: 130) The identity change Becker refers to here is that from Party member to dissident - in voluntarily rejecting the former identity he is forced to adopt the latter. Similarly, when asked if he still considered himself a socialist after his experiences with the Party, Becker confirmed his new attitude to his politics and the SED:

> Ich halte mich für einen Sozialisten, ja. Ihr Anhängsel, das ich mal war, muß ich abschneiden. Und Zwar: Der ich mal war, bin ich nach wie vor, was meine Hoffnungen betrifft, was meine Wünsche betrifft, was meine Absichten betrifft. Der ich mal war, bin ich nicht mehr, was meine Methoden betrifft, auch was meine Freunde betrifft, was nicht nur an mir liegt, und was meine Genossen betrifft. (Rumler & Schwarz 1977: 132)

For Richard Zipser (1978: 403), *Schlaflose Tage* serves 'to reveal the "new" Jurek Becker – a writer unwilling to make compromises', an attitude reflected in the novel's protagonist, Simrock, a teacher who becomes aware of his own mortality after experiencing a pain in his heart during a lesson one day. Although the pain is mild, it has a profound effect on Simrock, compelling him to enter a phase of reassessment and self-evaluation, which, as the title of the novel implies, is at odds with the inert, passive, 'sleeping' society around him. Indeed, Simrock tells his wife 'der Vorfall bedeute einen Wendepunkt in seinem und somit auch in ihrem Leben und werde vermutlich

[74] See Beate Müller's chapter on *Schlaflose Tage* in her edited volume *Zensur im modernen deutschen Kulturraum* for a full discussion of the reasons the novel was never published in the GDR.

Konsequenzen haben, die weiterreichten, als er im Moment absehen könne'. (ST: 10) Here Simrock can be read almost as an alter-ego of Becker in direct contrast with the way Becker succeeded in maintaining a critical distance between himself and protagonist Gregor in *Irreführung der Behörden,* although there too he was writing about very personal experiences. This tendency to use Simrock as a mouthpiece for the author's opinions is one of the main weaknesses of the novel. The pain Simrock feels in his heart, which, as Elke Kasper (1997: 267) shows, 'symptomatisch für eine Identitätskrise steht' and the dramatic, still unknown changes this will bring about in his life are akin to the shock and the very conscious change in his identity Becker experienced as a result of Biermann's expatriation and his own expulsion from the SED. Through Simrock, arguably more so than through any of his other protagonists, Becker works through the processes of personal, political and professional change he was experiencing at the time of writing. Simrock's words, 'Ich denke darüber nach, wie ich mein Leben von Grund auf ändern könnte' (ST: 26), surely apply equally to his author here.

4.3.3.2 Er wünschte sich zum Kommunismus eine innigere Beziehung

In that Simrock discovers a new 'Lust auf Zukunft' (ST: 27), resolves to take responsibility for himself and fight against the rules while ignoring those who brand him a 'Störenfried' (ST: 26), he represents also the very antithesis of the conformist Gregor Bienek in *Irreführung der Behörden.* In this earlier novel the criticism lies very much with Gregor and his readiness to conform, whereas *Schlaflose Tage* unleashes a scathing attack on the absolute and corrupt power of the state and on the conformist population which allows itself to be oppressed. If Gregor represents the very attributes against which Becker protests, as discussed earlier,[75] then Simrock provides the model to overcome and correct these self-destructive attitudes, something which is hinted at by intertextual references to *Irreführung der Behörden.* This is most palpable when Simrock decides to mislead the school authorities by applying for permission to undertake manual work during the holidays, claiming he wants to develop a closer relationship to workers and improve the social relevance of his teaching. Simrock is praised highly by the authorities and his teaching colleagues, all of whom are ignorant of the real motivation behind his application, namely to discover if he can bear to have a manual job before he embarks on a plan of action which may lead to him losing his teaching job. Similarly, in the final chapter of

[75] See section 2.2.4

Irreführung, Gregor's wife accuses him of deceiving those who have a right to expect 'Aufrichtigkeit' from him, and indeed it is this lack of sincerity that leads to Gregor's identity crisis. As Simrock begins to think about how he can learn 'bis an seine Grenzen vorzudringen', he realises he must 'sich mühen, aufrichtig zu sein. Nicht nur in Zeiten, da Aufrichtigkeit erlaubt ist, sondern immer'. (ST: 28-9)

Simrock realises that the majority of his problems stem from the fact that 'er [hatte] in der vergangenen Zeit alle die Gedanken verjagt, die für seine Existenz von Bedeutung waren' (ST: 23) and that if he is to effect any positive changes he must take responsibility for his actions and choices. He leaves his wife and daughter and makes radical changes in his approach to teaching, trying to impress on the pupils 'wie wichtig es ist, sich beunruhigen lassen zu können'. (ST: 86) Simrock's attempts at teaching the children to think and act independently swiftly lead to him losing his job, after which he returns to work as a van driver at the bakery where he had worked as his experiment in manual labour. He meets a new girlfriend, Antonia, towards whom he feels able to be honest, open and loving, yet she is arrested while they are on holiday in Hungary as she attempts to flee over the border to Austria, a life outside the GDR seemingly preferable to anything a life with Simrock can offer her.

Despite Simrock's critical stance and Antonia's escape attempt, they are both (or in Antonia's case, had once been) committed communists. Indeed, Simrock quite consciously re-evaluates his relationship to communism after realising 'sein ganzes Unglück ergebe sich aus einer kläglichen Meinungslosigkeit' (ST: 65) and that when asked for his opinion in the past, he had given the answer that was expected of him. Now he decides this must change:

> Wenn jemand ihn in dieser Sekunde nach seiner Weltanschauung gefragt hätte, wäre es ihm unmöglich gewesen zu antworten. Statt der selbstverständlichen Antwort, er sei Kommunist, hätte er sich jetzt die Frage gestellt, worauf er eine solche Behauptung denn stützen wolle, außer darauf, daß er dieselbe Auskunft schon immer gegeben hatte. (ST: 65-6)

Yet Simrock is not rejecting communism, merely the way it is practised in the GDR. 'Er wünschte sich zum Kommunismus eine innigere Beziehung, als sich immer nur akkurat an landesüblichen Regeln zu halten, die, wie er in diesem Augenblick zu verstehen glaubte, verbesserungswürdig waren.' (ST: 66) When he meets Antonia, Simrock's political commitment becomes all the more evident. He is shocked by her attitude towards politics:

> Sie behauptete, vor Jahren schon gemerkt zu haben, daß Aufrichtigkeit hierzulande nur dann gefragt sei, wenn der Aufrichtige und die Vielzahl seiner Vorgesetzten übereinstimmten. Seither könne ihr Politik gestohlen bleiben. Auf dem besten Weg, eine Sozialistin aus dem Bilderbuch zu werden, sei diese Erkenntnis über sie gekommen, und seither habe sie sich alles, was mit Politik zu tun hat, möglichst vom Leib gehalten. (ST: 73)

For some time Antonia had managed to conceal her contempt for the politics around her and even began a physics degree until an 'Unvorsichtigkeit' revealed her true thoughts and led to her expulsion from university (ST: 73). Simrock tries to persuade her that this is not sufficient reason to reject politics entirely: 'Davon, wie Sozialismus um uns herum betrieben wird, sollte ein gescheiter Sozialist sich nicht abschrecken lassen.' Antonia counters: 'Ich bin nur ein gescheiter Mensch, denn man hat mich so erschreckt, daß mich die Sache nicht mehr interessiert. Ich sehe in meiner Interesselosigkeit die einzige Methode, mich zu schützen.' (ST: 74) Nevertheless, Simrock is not deterred, rather he feels 'eine missionarische Vorfreude bei dem Gedanken, sie zu verwandeln.' (ST: 75)

This section of the novel was, unsurprisingly, one of the sticking points with Hinstorff that led to their ultimate rejection of the text after Becker had refused to make changes to Simrock's line of persuasion here. Not only is the criticism of GDR socialism overt, it also suggests there is no *Lebensstrategie* that the individual can employ to achieve political fulfilment in the GDR - although Simrock is still trying to find such a strategy at this point, he will ultimately fail. Antonia is so badly frightened by the politics she sees around her that she has retreated into the private sphere and has become entirely apolitical, seeking to lead her life 'in der ihr größtmöglichen Unabhängigkeit'. (ST: 74) By contrast, Simrock finds himself caught up in a dichotomy: on the one hand he wants to embrace the ideology of communism more wholeheartedly than he has done in the past, but realises at the same time he must do this in isolation from his social surroundings.

4.3.3.3 In unserem Staat [wird] niemand fallengelassen

This sense of isolation is a prevalent theme throughout the novel. Simrock is rejected by society for his independent behaviour, and even before his 'heart attack', we see that Simrock's relationship to his family is poor. He only spends time with his daughter from a sense of duty 'wie man zum Dienst geht, zur Erfüllung einer Pflicht' (ST: 12) and arguments with his wife, Ruth, are only contained by their ten-point

'Schlafzimmerordnung' which they created on moving into their flat. 'Punkt eins besagte, daß in diesem Zimmer Streit von draußen nicht mehr zählte.' (ST: 15) In this way the family becomes representative of society, Simrock's relationship to Ruth symbolic of Becker's relationship to the Party, characterised by silence with no room for criticism or discussion of the really fundamental issues. Similarly, the way in which Simrock ends his marriage can be read as analogous to Becker's protest at Biermann's expatriation, as he was no longer willing to discuss things behind closed doors. Simrock tells Ruth: 'Ich bin auch nicht länger bereit, unser freundliches Zimmer für eine Lösung zu halten. [...] Wir können nur deshalb beieinanderliegen, weil wir uns verleugnen, und weil wir uns verleugnen, vergewaltigen wir uns.' (ST: 36-7)

This isolation continues for Simrock after he leaves Ruth and is faced with the practical problem of where to live. He realises that amongst his many acquaintances there is none that he would call a real friend, and the few visits he makes to enquire about staying in acquaintances' spare rooms are only embarrassing for all concerned. Simrock feels this loneliness particularly keenly in the school when he realises that the syllabus is so full it uses every minute of every lesson and 'soll genau das verhindern, was mir so wichtig wäre: daß Lehrer Zeit finden, Kinder auch nach ihren eigenen Vorstellungen zu unterrichten und zu erziehen'. (ST: 135) The deputy headmaster of Simrock's school, Kabitzke, is the closest Simrock comes to having a friend before he institutes changes in his life. Yet in his position of authority in the school, Kabitzke is part of the system of power that represses Simrock. Kabitzke warns Simrock that his new behaviour is 'selbstzerstörerisch' (ST: 55) and asks how it is that he is always in trouble, to which Simrock responds: 'Indem ich lebe.' (ST: 118) Kabitzke's hypocrisy is revealed clearly when, just moments after assuring Simrock of his support, he swiftly tries to persuade Simrock to accept his dismissal from his teaching position so that he, Kabitzke, will not be called upon to demonstrate the promised support. When faced with a difficult decision, Kabitzke does not hesitate to choose the option that is least threatening to himself.

This opportunist behaviour, which awakens a sense of 'Übelkeit' in Simrock (ST: 147), is shown to be representative of the wider society in which Simrock lives. This becomes particularly evident in a letter of complaint sent to the headmaster of the school by a pupil's father, outraged that his son had been asked to read out Brecht's poem 'Lob des Zweifels' in Simrock's lesson:

> Meine Frau und ich haben uns stets die größte Mühe gegeben, Zweifel von unseren Kindern fernzuhalten. Wir wollen sie zu guten Staatsbürgern erziehen, die in verantwortungsbewußter Arbeit und nicht in ständiger Krittelei die Antriebsfeder zur Entwicklung des Sozialismus sehen. Wie aber, fragen wir uns, sollen wir sie mit revolutionärer Geduld erfüllen, wenn einer ihrer Lehrer sie zu Zweiflern macht und ihnen so die Zuversicht nimmt. (ST: 117)

While Simrock is amused by the misquotation of 'revolutionärer Geduld', which should, of course, read 'revolutionärer Ungeduld', this letter and particularly this misquotation epitomise the anti-Marxist passivity of the GDR which Becker so despised. Elke Kasper (1997: 270) argues Simrock's previous conformity should not be read as a result of a flaw in his character: 'im Gegenteil vermittelt der Roman den Eindruck, daß Konformismus ein Erziehungsziel des Unterrichts an ehemaligen DDR-Schulen war'. Hence the novel suggests there is no hope for future generations of East Germans growing up as a part of this society and education system.

To a greater extent than in any of Becker's previous texts, this novel is harshly critical of the SED and its politics. While *Irreführung der Behörden* certainly implied the GDR was a society where conformity was rewarded and dissent punished, *Schlaflose Tage* directly criticises the undemocratic regime, which Becker satirises in the guidelines Simrock draws up for himself on how to become a better teacher. These guidelines are equally applicable to the requirements for democratic leadership. Simrock decides he must be closer to the children, more aware of their needs. He must stay true to his principles, regardless of the consequences: '[Der gute Lehrer] hat gewonnen, wenn die Kinder ihn akzeptieren, obwohl sie ihn ungestraft ablehnen könnten.' (ST: 59)

The novel takes up the theme of democracy with regard to the 1 May demonstrations, when Simrock faces disciplinary action at school for telling his class attendance was not obligatory but a matter of personal choice. Subsequently only a third of his pupils attended the demonstration. Kabitzke warns Simrock: 'Es gibt Leute, denen dein ausdrücklicher Hinweis auf die Freiwilligkeit der Teilnahme wie eine Kampfansage vorkommt.' (ST: 54) Simrock refuses to yield to the political demands of the school. 'Du wünschst dir offenbar, daß die Teilnahme an gewissen Veranstaltungen freiwillig heißt, daß ich aber dennoch für vollzähliges Erscheinen der Kinder zu sorgen habe. Diese Aufgabe überfordert mich, und darum werde ich in Zukunft einen Unterschied zwischen tatsächlicher und angeblicher Freiwilligkeit nicht mehr anerkennen.' (ST: 55)

Perhaps the most critical section of the novel is that where Antonia tries to flee over the Austro-Hungarian border and is subsequently arrested, and indeed this was one of the many passages that prevented the novel's publication. Antonia explains to Simrock that she tried to escape while on holiday because it suddenly occurred to her 'daß sie hier wahrscheinlich nicht so leicht schießen. Und ich habe mit dieser Vermutung auch recht gehabt, niemand hat versucht, mich zu erschießen. Sie sind nur hinter mir hergerannt, und wenn ich nur ein bißchen schneller hätte laufen können, dann hätte ich es geschafft'. (ST: 112-13) Despite lengthy arguments with Hinstorff, Becker insisted on keeping this passage. 'Er [Becker] würde es sich nicht verzeihen, seinen Unmut über eine solche Beobachtung nicht niedergeschrieben zu haben, und er möchte das lieber eingekleidet in einem solchen Buch tun als in einem Interview mit der Westpresse.' (SAPMO DY30/85) After an initial feeling of having been betrayed by Antonia, Simrock directs his rage at the circumstances that have separated them. 'Er hielt es plötzlich für ihr gutes Recht, dorthin zu gehen, wohin sie gehen wollte, und für ein ebenso gutes Recht zurückzukehren, wenn es ihr an dem anderen Ort nicht mehr gefiel.' (ST: 114) Whereas the Iron Curtain has never played an important role in any of Becker's previous texts and was even significantly underplayed in *Irreführung der Behörden* (although only the second half of this novel takes place post-1961), in the contemporary political climate Becker found himself in, after his friend Biermann had been expatriated and while other friends such as Sarah Kirsch and Manfred Krug were preparing to leave, the issue of imprisonment and confinement became a key theme of his writing.

There are various other points within the text which evoke a sense of physical imprisonment. Simrock initially feels imprisoned by every aspect of his life and wants to break out of 'den Ring um mich'. (ST: 56) In the opening pages when Kabitzke seeks out Simrock to talk to him about his changed behaviour, he leads Simrock 'wie einen Gefangenen den Flur entlang'. (ST: 20) Similarly, when Simrock signs his contract at the bakery his supervisor observes him with a satisfied expression, 'als habe er einen Gefangenen gemacht'. (ST: 84) The theme of confinement continues through to the end of the novel, when Antonia still has a year of her sentence to serve. Furthermore, when she is released from prison it will be back into the repressive society she sought to escape in the first place.

At the end of the novel Simrock is offered his teaching job back, with the condition that he publicly acknowledges his earlier mistakes, on the grounds that 'in unserem Staat

werde niemand fallengelassen'. (ST: 154) Simrock rejects the offer, knowing he neither wants nor is able to become the type of teacher the state demands. He asks the *Schulrätin* 'Wie können Sie hoffen, ich entschuldigte mich für ein Unrecht, das man mir zugefügt hat? Wie können Sie von mir erwarten, daß ich Dankbarkeit für eine Demütigung aufbringe? Und vor allem: Wie können Sie sich einen Lehrer wünschen, der auf solche Angebote einzugehen bereit ist?' (ST: 156) Here Simrock's transition, his awakening from his sleepless days, is complete. His new-found integrity and political values are more important to him than his job as a teacher and he reflects back over the recent months.

> Den größten Ekel hat mir wahrscheinlich gemacht, daß ich mich nie gewehrt habe. Ich habe getan, dachte er, als sei es nicht meine Sache, mich gegen Bevormundung und Ungerechtigkeiten aufzulehnen. Und das bedeutet: Ich habe mich nicht zuständig gefühlt für mich selbst.' Indeed, considering the whole chain of events in a positive light, 'sei die damals entstandene Beunruhigung, von der er ja heute noch zehre, vielleicht ein Gewinn gewesen. (ST: 157)

Despite Simrock's positive outlook here, the novel is essentially still very bleak. While Simrock has achieved personal integrity and a level of self-realisation, this is at the expense of his chosen career, a self-denial Becker was not prepared to make. As Thomas Bremer shows, this compromise means that Simrock's political goal of teaching children to think independently and question, rather than blindly follow authority can never be realised. 'Simrock bleibt sich selbst treu, ja: aber im gleichsam privatisierenden Rückzug aufs Brotausfahren werden seine politischen Hoffnungen nicht eingelöst.' (Bremer 1978: 476) As he becomes politically and socially ostracised, Simrock loses his ability to have an influence on his surroundings. Furthermore, as Beate Müller (2003: 328) notes, Simrock's behaviour only serves to highlight how hypocritical these surroundings are: 'Simrocks kritische Haltung und sein mutiges Verhalten demaskieren die Heuchelei und autoritären politischen Strukturen in seinem beruflichen und gesellschaftlichen Umfeld.' The fact that Antonia is still in prison at the end of the novel reminds the reader that unlike Becker, Simrock and Antonia have no choice but to remain where they are.

4.4 Fortschritt [kann] auch in Ernüchterung bestehen

4.4.1 Sozialist zu sein ist überhaupt kein Grund, in die DDR zu gehen

The bleak, critical tone of *Schlaflose Tage* is continued in the volume of short stories, *Nach der ersten Zukunft.* While this volume deals with a wide range of themes, a key focus is that of political independence and integrity as Becker seeks to assert his notion of a socialist identity in a way that had been denied to him in the GDR. If *Schlaflose Tage* can be criticised for being too polemic in its condemnation of the SED regime, with implausible characters and long political tirades breaking up the narrative, then the stories Becker composed in the months following this novel are far more subtle and multi-faceted in their exploration of East German socialism. In particular they explore the issue of political responsibility and accountability in a more sophisticated manner than can be claimed of *Schlaflose Tage,* where protagonist Simrock is portrayed somewhat unbelievably as politically incorruptible, beyond reproach in his desire to achieve political and personal fulfilment. Like *Schlaflose Tage*, although for quite different reasons, *Nach der ersten Zukunft* was also rejected for publication in the GDR and originally only appeared in a Suhrkamp edition in the West. An abridged version was published by Hinstorff in 1986.[76]

Becker's struggle to publish *Nach der ersten Zukunft* (originally titled *Die zweite Zukunft*) was no less arduous than the processes he underwent in trying to get *Schlaflose Tage* into print, despite his willingness to make some concessions regarding some of the more overtly political texts here.[77] However, one text which he insisted be kept in the volume was 'Der Verdächtige', about a man who comes under observation from the security services and tries to become as inconspicuous as possible in order to prove the unknown reasons behind this suspicion to be unfounded. He achieves this self-suppression so successfully that soon he loses all social and professional contacts and retreats into paranoid isolation. This story, along with a similar text 'Allein mit dem Anderen', is one of

[76] Hinstorff did publish a volume similar to *Nach der ersten Zukunft* in 1986, entitled *Erzählungen.* However, four pieces had been cut from the volume. The pieces in question are 'Ansprache vor dem Kongreß der unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen', 'Personen', 'Der Fluch der Verwandtschaft' and 'Wenn auch nur eine Meinung'. In a 1995 interview with Paul O'Doherty and Colin Riordan (1998:22) Becker claimed his decision to omit certain texts from this later volume had no political motives, rather was due to aesthetic considerations. I concur with O'Doherty and Riordan, however, that Becker is deliberately underplaying the significance of the omitted texts here, possibly because he preferred not to admit to having made any political compromise.

[77] Becker agreed to leave out 'Fluch der Verwandtschaft', although he warned it would still appear in the Suhrkamp edition. Further, it was agreed that 'Protokoll eines Gesprächs...' would appear in neither edition, as both publishers felt it was of inferior quality compared to other texts in the volume.

the reasons that *Nach der ersten Zukunft* was not published in 1980 in the GDR.[78] Ironically, while Suhrkamp found the settings for the stories in the volume spatially ambiguous and urged Becker to make it more 'DDR-konkret', the *Stasi* thought the book was unacceptable. A report from October 1979 concluded, 'daß Becker in diesem Buch die DDR als Polizei- und Überwachungsstaat hinstellt, mit dem man sich abfinden müsse. 3 Erzählungen sollen direkte Angriffe gegen das MfS beinhalten'. (BStU MfS AP 2275/92) Nevertheless, negotiations regarding the book's publication continued. Indeed, in private reports to Klaus Höpcke, senior members of Hinstorff staff expressed concerns about the political implications of rejecting the book after Becker made it clear in his discussions with them that his return to the GDR depended on *Nach der ersten Zukunft* being published there:

> Wir gewannen den Eindruck, daß vom Klassengegner systematisch ein "Fall Becker" aufgebaut wird; man arbeitet sehr zielstrebig, umsichtig und vielfältig daraufhin, eine Rückkehr Beckers zu verhindern. Zu vermuten ist dabei, daß Becker sich nicht bewußt ist, wie hier mit ihm gespielt wird. Es wird auch kaum möglich sein, ihm dies klarzumachen, ohne dabei sein künstlerisches Selbstbewußtsein zu verletzen. Ziel des Gegners ist dabei nicht nur, Becker zum endgültigen Verlassen der DDR zu bewegen, sondern es ist zu vermuten, daß dabei das Verfahren "zeitweiliger Auslandsaufenthalt" als sinnlos erscheinen und Rückwirkung auf andere Autoren haben soll. (BStU MfS AP 2275/92)

Here the book is being judged in wholly political terms, the decision as to whether it should be published or not hinging on which option would appear to be the least damaging politically. That Becker had been relatively reticent in criticising the GDR after his move to the West, now served in his favour. Although he had been labelled a dissident in relation to the protest over Biermann's expatriation, he had retained a limited element of political acceptability through his refusal to speak out against the GDR in the western press. While living in the GDR Becker had been very outspoken against the Party, such as in the interview he had given to *Spiegel* in July 1977 which contained many barbed comments and criticisms directed at the SED and was one of the reasons *Schlaflose Tage* failed to be published. When Becker moved to the West a few months later he did not give any critical interviews to western media for some time, a marked change from his earlier angry outbursts. Indeed, in a 1980 *Spiegel* interview Becker went so far as to suggest the reason

[78] These two stories are analysed in some detail in section 3.2.4.

he had been able to obtain a ten-year extension of his initial two-year visa was 'eine Art Honorar' for this restrained behaviour. (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 205)

Ironically, it was Becker's comments in the same interview that finally signalled the end of any hopes that *Nach der ersten Zukunft* could be published in the GDR. In this interview Becker publicly admitted for the first time that he did not want to return to the GDR as he did not think he could write there. He also clearly declared himself in opposition to new GDR laws and policy[79] and when questioned about his visa extension Becker was scathing of the SED, to whom he referred as the 'Gegenseite'. Moreover, he offered another theory to explain his generous visa extension: 'Es handelt sich bei dieser Regelung um eine Art Erklärung, daß man es unter den gegebenen Umständen nicht miteinander aushält.' (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 205) While Becker admitted he was afraid of permanently distancing himself from the GDR, he claimed that this had nothing to do with his political convictions, emphasising once again that his political identity now transcended any national or geographical affinity: 'Sozialist zu sein ist überhaupt kein Grund, in die DDR zu gehen.' (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 207) This interview was discussed at a meeting between Höpcke, Harry Fauth from Hinstorff and senior members of the *Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandlungen*, where it was denounced as 'eine Absage Beckers an die DDR'. (BStU MfS AP 2275/92) Höpcke was particularly infuriated by Becker's comment that he had observed an 'Ähnlichkeit im Häßlichen' (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 212) between the GDR and West Germany: 'Genosse Höpcke ist der Auffassung, daß dieses Interview von Becker ausreichend dafür wäre, ihm den Paß als Bürger der DDR abzunehmen. Deshalb sei es mehr als berechtigt, im Interesse einer Verhinderung größeren politisch-ideologischen Schadens in der DDR auf die Veröffentlichung dieses Becker-Romans zu verzichten.' (BStU MfS AP 2275/92)

Despite such clear instructions from Höpcke, the report goes on to debate publishing the book in an unwitting and grotesque parody of 'Der Verdächtige', where the narrator realises he has an impossible choice between an action and its opposite: 'ich könne nicht alles beides für gleich verdächtig halten, ansonsten bliebe mir ja nur, verrückt zu werden'. (NZ: 263) The *Stasi* fear that stopping publication of the book could be the precise 'taktisches Ziel' of the *Spiegel* interview and wonder 'ob dies einfach dafür spricht,

[79] Becker is mindful of the *3. Strafrechtsänderungsgesetz* from June 1979 here. In particular, § 106 which referred to 'Staatsfeindliche Hetze', § 219 relating to 'ungesetzliche Verbindungsaufnahme' and § 220 which outlawed 'Öffentliche Herabwürdigung' could be used against authors whose work was deemed too critical of the State and could lead to eight, five or three years imprisonment respectively.

"uns nicht beirren" zu lassen und die Veröffentlichung vorzunehmen, oder ob bei gründlicher Erwägung nicht trotzdem doch mehr gegen eine Veröffentlichung spricht.' (BStU MfS AP 2275/92) Such confusion was no doubt caused by the increasing flow of well-known intellectuals leaving the GDR at the time. As early as 1976, Thomas Brasch had left for the West and lyricist Bernd Jentzsch had failed to return from a trip to Switzerland. In 1977, the same year Becker made a 'temporary' move to the West, Sarah Kirsch, Manfred Krug, Reiner Kunze and Hans Joachim Schädlich were amongst those who left, the flow continuing over the next couple of years with notable names such as Günter Kunert and Klaus Poche successfully applying for exit visas. As so many authors well-respected in East and West sought to leave the GDR, the authorities became increasingly desperate to stem the flow, hence the willingness to consider publishing *Nach der ersten Zukunft.* However, Höpcke's decision was final and like its predecessor, the book was only published by Suhrkamp in the West at the time.

4.4.2 Joining the Ranks of the *gemäßigt Zukunftsfrohen*

That *Nach der ersten Zukunft* was not published in East Germany is not at all surprising if one considers the political content of the volume, where the majority of the pieces can be read as directly or indirectly criticising GDR politics. The short text 'Anstiftung zum Verrat', which David Rock (2000a: 28) reads as 'an exhortation to readers to become fully aware of the [day-to-day] situations in which they find themselves and of the roles which they unconsciously play in their everyday lives.' The piece serves as the very antithesis to 'Der Verdächtige' or 'Allein mit dem Anderen' and reminds the reader of Simrock's rebellion against the repressive authorities in *Schlaflose Tage*:

> Das Selbstverständliche, daß beinahe wie Schlaf ist, kurz unterbrechen. Ein paar Minuten ohne die bewährten Argumente auskommen. Dann eine Stunde, dann einen Tag. Ein Spiel spielen: Die Rolle seines Feindes übernehmen. Doch nicht absichtlich stümperhaft, sondern mit allem Ehrgeiz. Bis die Furcht, sich als der eigene Feind überzeugend zu finden, sich nach und nach verliert. Nicht gleich verzweifeln bei dem Gedanken: Warum eigentlich nicht? Er ist die Seele des Spiels.
>
> Das Spiel erst dann beenden, wenn die Rolle leergespielt ist. Ohne Ungeduld auf diesen Augenblick warten. Kommt er nicht, dann immer weiterspielen, im Notfall bis ans Ende. (NZ: 200)

In the same way that Simrock confronts and overcomes his fear of social and professional isolation and thus his fear of his enemy, Becker is inciting his readers here to take responsibility for their actions rather than remaining subservient to an oppressive regime.

In the following text, 'Ansprache vor dem Kongreß der unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen', the emphasis of the criticism is very definitely shifted towards the authorities. In his satirical speech to the *Kongreß der unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen*, the narrator explains he had once too belonged to their ranks but had now left in order to join the *gemäßigt Zukunftsfrohen*, where he finds his optimism for the future is in no way lessened, 'eher zuverlässiger und nicht mehr so kränklich.' (NZ: 204) He tells his audience they are responsible not only for this shift in his allegiances, but for the overwhelming number of *unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen* who are experiencing similar disillusionment: 'die Quelle der Ernüchterung sind Ihre Wünsche und Erwartungen selbst, das Übermaß darin'. (NZ: 205) Even now, the narrator continues, he can still hear their 'frohen Reden, die nur von Beifall unterbrochen wurden, nie von Bedenken' (NZ: 202) and refers once again to the group's declining membership as a sign that this situation is no longer sustainable. 'Ich sehe darin den Beweis, daß Ihre Art von Frohsinn nur unter Verlusten beizubehalten ist, nur unter Verlusten, wie man sagt, an Leib und Seele.' (NZ: 204) In closing, the narrator offers the *unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen* the opportunity to work with the *gemäßigt Zukunftsfrohen* as partners. He assures them that they are not pessimistic like *die Vereinigung der Hoffnungslosen*, but that they are realistic in their expectations. 'Wir haben keine einzige Erwartung aufgegeben, bevor uns nicht erwiesen schien, daß da kein Weg ist.' (NZ: 206) For the narrator, this realism is a positive step and he assures his audience, 'daß Fortschritt auch in Ernüchterung bestehen kann'. (NZ: 209) Here Becker is seeking to construct a new, positive political identification, one which is wholly separate from the concept of the SED as *Heimat*, but which nevertheless includes membership of a like-minded group or collective. It is a measure of the strength of Becker's socialist identity that it has survived such fundamental disillusionment and disappointment and also that he continues to define it in such positive terms.

Clearly the *unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen* can be read as analogous to both the SED and the *Schriftstellerverband* here; the criticism the narrator levies at his audience echoes Becker's own frustrations with his former political party and the union. In the text Becker is able to bring into the public sphere issues that were not discussed on an official level and express his dismay at the Party's stubbornly self-congratulatory approach to its politics.

Several times in the text the narrator emphasises the falling membership rates of the *unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen* and their failure to heed this as a warning. Juxtaposed with the unrealistic and increasingly positive outlook expressed by the group, these membership numbers surely point to its ultimate demise if it cannot reform. Thus it is implied that the invitation to work in partnership with the *gemäßigt Zukunftsfrohen*, or in the case of the *Schriftstellerverband*, to accept political debate and differences of opinion within its ranks, offers the only salvation for either group. Indeed, the three way categorisation is clearly representative of the state of the *Schriftstellerverband* in the late 1970s, the speech addressing the Union's own problems with dwindling membership. The *unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen* are most keenly represented by Hermann Kant, who replaced Anna Seghers as president of the *Schriftstellerverband* at the *Schriftstellerkongreß* of 1978 and who continued to claim even after 1989 that the Union had been a 'legale Platform der Kritik' and an 'Ort auf dem Weg zur Freiheit'. (cited in Emmerich 1996: 261) Joining Becker in the *gemäßigt Zukunftsfrohen* would be those authors such as Günter Kunert or Christa Wolf who were critical of the Party but still hoping to work for change. The *Hoffnungslosen* refers to those such as Thomas Brasch, Sarah Kirsch and Jürgen Fuchs who had left permanently for the West (the latter after imprisonment in the GDR) and who no longer harboured any hope for the reform of GDR socialism. At the above-mentioned Eighth *Schriftstellerkongreß* only Hermlin and Braun of the original signatories of the Biermann protest letter were present. Becker and Heiner Müller had resigned from the Union and the remaining eight, along with other critical writers such as Plenzdorf and Schlesinger, were either not invited to attend or voluntarily chose to stay away. As a result, de Bruyn and Jakobs also declined to attend 'weil sie es "sinnlos" fanden, "einen Kongreß zu besuchen, der einem Meinungsstreit durch Ausschluß all derer, die anderer Meinung sind, aus dem Wege geht".' (cited in Emmerich 1996: 260)

However, 'Ansprache vor dem Kongreß der unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen' reads not only as another attack on the *Schriftstellerverband* or the SED, rather it can simultaneously be understood as Becker's attempt at repositioning himself as a socialist after the recent years of political turmoil he had experienced. Becker is stating quite clearly that while his political methods and practices have diverged completely with those of his former political allies, he still believes they share some common goals. Furthermore, Becker sees his disillusionment of the utopian ideal as a wholly positive shift and is urging the SED and

the *Schriftstellerverband* to follow in these steps. Whether he believes them to be capable of making such a transition is left far more open-ended.

Where *Schlaflose Tage* was (perhaps justifiably) criticised for being too polemical in its attack on the GDR and for its poorly constructed, implausible characters, *Nach der ersten Zukunft* now offers a more rounded political observation from Becker. While his texts are still critical of the state, they are more subtle than *Schlaflose Tage*. Further, the focus of much of the political criticism here are the subservient citizens who conform to a repressive regime, some of whom Becker portrays in a first person narrative 'in order to expose their cowardly mentality from the "inside"' (Rock 2000a: 29) and who Becker seeks to inspire to work towards self realisation and political independence with texts such as 'Anstiftung zum Verrat'. In 'Allein mit dem Anderen' the accelerated promotion of the protagonist to high-ranking civil servant is reminiscent of de Bruyn's *Märkische Forschungen* (1978), where the revered Professor Menzel enjoys great academic success and public acclaim in his career as a researcher, a success which is derived from his willingness to distort facts to produce politically expedient results rather than accurate ones. Similarly, the narrator's total withdrawal from society in 'Der Verdächtige' reads as a Kafkaesque precursor to the wrongfully imprisoned Dallow in Christoph Hein's *Der Tangospieler* (1989), who becomes utterly indifferent to his socio-political surroundings after suffering this injustice. As Paul O'Doherty and Colin Riordan (1998: 21) suggest, undertones of Kafka (specifically his 'Bericht für eine Akademie') are also present in 'Ansprache vor dem Kongreß der unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen'. This piece implies a regime that is out of touch with the population and prophetically warns that this continuing failure to listen to popular concerns will swiftly lead to its demise.

4.4.3 Ich will mich nicht raushalten

Hence as he was trying to establish a new life in the FRG, Becker was also repositioning himself politically after his split with the SED. Although Becker never aligned himself with any West German political parties, it was clear to him from the outset that he wanted to be politically involved in his surroundings, for Becker this involvement constituted an integral part of belonging to a society. In one of his earliest interviews after settling in West Berlin Becker was asked whether he would seek to become politically engaged in West Germany or whether he would be able to hold himself out of politics. 'Ich glaube das

nicht nur nicht, sondern ich will mich nicht raushalten.' In explanation, Becker continued that he felt, for example, it was 'ein Gebot politischer Hygiene [...], sich dagegen zu wehren, daß jemand wie Strauß Bundeskanzler wird' but that he would certainly not be joining a political party. (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 212)

One of Becker's first political involvements in West Berlin was to participate in the *Aktion für mehr Demokratie*, an initiative organised by, amongst others, Günter Grass and Klaus Staeck, in protest at the Springer press. Along with other artists from the GDR, such as Schlesinger and Biermann, and a number of western writers, literary critics and academics, Becker signed a statement refusing to work for or with the Springer press group in any way on the grounds that it stifled democracy and free speech and tried to manipulate its readership to further conservative interests. As this action involved intellectuals from both sides of the border and did not affect the GDR in any way, it enabled Becker to positively affirm his political position in the West without causing any more tension in his relationship with the GDR, which had been relatively harmonious after the furore caused by his *Spiegel* interview the previous year had died down.

Indeed, Becker continued to exercise caution in his political comments and activities, seemingly hoping to avoid further clashes with the GDR authorities in an attempt to keep the channels back to the East open. In December 1981 he was asked by Stephan Hermlin to speak at the *Berliner Begegnung zur Friedensförderung*, which was intended to address the looming threat of nuclear warfare from East and West German viewpoints. The official SED line was that the West was entirely to blame for the current international political crisis and that while the West German Peace Movement was a welcome initiative, it would be superfluous in the GDR where the government already championed such politics. In keeping with the philosophy of the conference, Becker was clear that for him, the question of peace transcended narrow party politics and warned: 'Wir sollten uns nicht zum Sprachrohr der einen oder anderen Regierung machen.' (Krüger 1982: 54) Furthermore, Becker emphasised that he saw East and West as equally at fault in failing to prevent the current critical situation occurring and urged political resistance against armament policies: 'Ich vermute, daß in unserer Nichtübereinstimmung mit den jeweiligen Beschlüssen der Regierungen oder Blöcke die einzige Hoffnung liegt.' (Krüger 1982: 55) Becker did make a barbed comment on the second day of the conference regarding the lack of anti-war demonstrations in the GDR and USSR compared to the West: 'Ich glaube, es gibt auf die Frage, warum es hier keine Friedensdemonstrationen

gibt, keine andere wahre Antwort, als die, daß sie verboten sind, als die, daß ihre Teilnehmer mit Nachteilen zu rechnen hätten.' (Krüger 1982: 136) However, on balance Becker managed to express his opinion on the current political crisis without directing his criticism at either side in particular. As Gilman (2002: 211) shows, 'Becker stellte sich damit über die politische Auseinandersetzung, während er zugleich an ihr beteiligt war'.

Initially it seemed that Becker had succeeded in making a relatively smooth move from his political involvement in East to West Germany. Becker's early political activities while living in West Berlin involved intellectuals from both side of the Iron Curtain and the international discourse of the Peace Movement transcended national or party politics. Yet the seemingly unproblematic transition soon became more complicated. For while Becker was able through his writing to explore his continuing concern about the state of East German politics, he found that as his relationships within the GDR grew more distant over time, as we saw in the previous chapter, he no longer had a forum for discussing GDR affairs, not least because he was no longer a party member. The situation did not improve when he built new relationships in the West: 'für lange Zeit [war] mein größtes Problem dort im Westen, daß ich fast mit niemandem über meine DDR-Sorgen sprechen könnte'. (Krüger 1982: 54) Moreover, Becker's position in West German political discourse proved more fragile than he had first hoped when, along with other ex-GDR dissidents such as Wolf Biermann, he was deliberately excluded from a West Berlin follow-up meeting of the *Begegnung zur Friedensförderung* in order to not offend the East German authorities.[80]

Indeed, Becker found it very difficult to position himself politically within the emerging West German literary discourse, which as we saw in Chapter Two had become increasingly depoliticised by the end of the 1970s when Becker returned from a visiting professorship in America to establish his permanent home in West Berlin. Although he found some political engagement in the Peace Movement as we saw above, the Movement itself lessened in intensity after 1983 and effectively signalled the end of political involvement amongst the older generation of writers. In part this was due to the deaths of key figures such as Alfred Andersch (1980), Peter Weiss (1982) and, most importantly, of Heinrich Böll (1985), while the relative failure of the Peace Movement itself showed how insignificant writers' political engagement had become, as Keith Bullivant (1994: 79)

[80] This meeting was a much smaller affair than the 1981 conference and organised this time by the *Verband deutscher Schriftsteller (VS)*, where many senior members had communist sympathies and were actively campaigning for increased diplomatic relations with GDR colleagues and high-ranking political functionaries.

shows: 'Not only were the rockets put in place, their subsequent removal had nothing at all to do with the Peace Movement, but rather with the political ambitions of the US and Soviet presidents, as well as changing political, economic and social forces.'

The younger generation of authors replacing Böll and his contemporaries rejected the role of 'conscience of the nation' this older generation had accepted so willingly. Amongst these authors was Hans Christoph Buch, who, despite being an active figure in the ecological movement, now declared his opposition to 'die rituelle Beschwörung des Weltuntergangs' on the grounds that it provided purely an 'Entlastungsfunktion: sie lenkt ab von der wirklichen Weltproblemen, verstellt den Blick auf die realen Krisen der Gegenwart'. Buch argues that the Iran/Iraq war or the Holocaust are rendered insignificant in a discourse obsessed with imminent apocalypse: 'Ich mache die globale Wehleidigkeit, ein apokalyptisches Krisengerede, das niemand mehr zu irgend etwas verpflichtet, nicht mit'. (Buch 1987: 32) Similarly, Michael Buselmeier saw no reason for writers to adopt a moral political role: 'Weshalb sollen ausgerechnet Schriftsteller und Linksintellektuelle geeignet sein, ihren Mitmenschen zu erklären, was richtig und falsch ist?' Indeed, Buselmeier goes on to claim that writers are incapable of assuming such a position. 'Wir selber, die linken Intellektuellen, und nicht nur die anderen, unsere "Klienten", sind krank, unfrei, "besetzt" vom Staat und vom Kapital mit "notwendig falschem Bewußtsein". Wir stehen nicht außerhalb der Geschichte als deren Interpreten und Helden.' (Buselmeier: 1987: 35) For Martin Lüdke (1987: 136), the era of a modernist educational literature was well and truly over: 'Böll, Walser, Grass - das sind große Namen. Nur, wofür stehen sie noch ein? Bestenfalls für routiniert geschriebene, unterhaltsam zu lesende, bei Lichte besehen aber unbedeutende Literatur.'

Instead, in the words of Botho Strauß, authors were beginning once again to 'write exclusively in the name of literature. You write under the supervision of all that has previously been written. But, since you no longer have a natural one, you also write in order slowly to create a spiritual home for yourself'. (cited in Bullivant 1994: 58) The concept of writing to create a spiritual home, or a sense of identity, was, of course, something Becker was extremely familiar with. Postmodernist tendencies can be observed in his writing from *Jakob der Lügner* to *Amanda herzlos*, the multiple narrative layers in both novels problematising the complex issues of truth and identity. Indeed, *Aller Welt Freund*, the first novel Becker wrote in the West, can be read in many ways as belonging to

the newly emerging body of postmodern literature.[81] It is a clear break from the moral tone of *Schlaflose Tage*, the focus now very explicitly on the *Angst* of the individual. The decision of Kilian, the protagonist, to commit suicide rather than continue to witness the daily horrors of the world around him should not be read as a social critique - none of the other characters are affected in a similar manner - but as a measure of Kilian's paranoia. Kilian perceives a global 'Verschwörung gegen mich' and feels that countless decisions 'nur deshalb getroffen werden, um mich, Kilian, zu demütigen, zu verängstigen und am Ende umzubringen'. (AF: 20)

As discussed in Chapter Three, *Aller Welt Freund* clearly reflects Becker's own sense of isolation and disorientation on moving to the West. Moreover, when read in the context of Becker's 1980 comment that, in the arena of West German politics, 'ich will mich nicht raushalten' (Schwarz & Becker 1980: 212), the novel takes on a political element. Despite this express wish to engage in the political discourse around him, Becker finds he is not able to do so. The spatial setting of the novel is so ambiguous that it could be any society in the developed world and the focus is the failure of an individual to come to terms with his surroundings. Yet despite his inability to set his work in the West, Becker is refusing to set it in the GDR, a clear act of rebellion against those who continue to label him an East German dissident:

> Ich habe meine dissidentischen Ansichten sozusagen in der DDR entsorgt. [...] Es war mir immer unangenehm, mich in Westdeutschland über die DDR zu äußern. Es hat mir nie gefallen, wie schnell mir ein Mikrophon hingehalten wurde, wenn ich in Westdeutschland über die DDR-Verhältnisse reden wollte, und wie schnell mir dieses Mikrophon wieder weggenommen wurde, wenn ich über die westdeutschen Verhältnisse reden wollte. (O'Doherty & Riordan 1998: 18)

In his aim to move from East to West Germany and remain a politically engaged citizen, Becker ultimately fails. Amongst other intellectuals who made this move, Becker falls between the two stools of writers such as Reiner Kunze, who consciously withdrew from all political engagement and the 'Betriebslärm' of the literary world (Schmidt-Mühlisch 1987: 65) in what Emmerich (1996: 426) describes as an '"innere[n] Emigration" [...], die schon vor seiner Übersiedlung eingesetzt hatte', and those who forged strong political allegiances in the West. A key example of the latter here is Rudolf Bahro, who moved from the GDR to West Germany after his release from prison in 1979

[81] See section 3.3.3 for a fuller discussion of this novel.

and became an active member of *Die Grünen*, publishing various works over subsequent years on ecology and socialism. After his experiences with the SED where he felt his integrity had been compromised and possibly mindful of Böll's comment that "a writer, who takes on any sort of party-political position is no longer a writer" (cited in Bullivant 1994: 77), Becker was clear from the outset that he would not be joining any West German political party. However, this lack of clear allegiance in the West meant that he was still labelled as an ex-GDR dissident and as such only expected to comment politically on the GDR, with which he had severed all political links. Ironically, the only matters on which Becker's political opinion was sought were precisely those issues in which he refused to engage, and as an 'innere Emigration' fundamentally conflicted with his understanding of his identity as a writer and a citizen, the 1980s proved to be a very frustrating and isolating time for Becker. He was angered by West German critics only wanting to view him and his work in the political context of the GDR, yet in the de-politicised literary era of the 1980s, Becker finds he is unable to develop a West German political identity.

4.5 Wende

4.5.1 Die Ernüchterung

If Becker's political isolation in the West was largely a result of his (at least semi-voluntary) withdrawal from the discourse of the time, then it was Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union that led to Becker re-engaging on some level as a politically active citizen. While the Soviet moves towards liberalisation precipitated a new age of uncertainty in global politics, Becker became increasingly prepared to criticise the politics of the GDR directly. As a rule, Becker had held himself back from publicly commenting on GDR events from the West 'weil ich Leute nicht sehr mag, die nach der Ehescheidung ihren früheren Partner beschimpfen'. (Traub & Becker 1992: 107) However, as the events of the late 1980s developed, Becker felt compelled to speak out against and critically distance himself from the GDR's politics. Becker had previously felt isolated from mainstream discourse, distanced from the East but unable to assimilate in the West. Now his position as an outsider, or as someone with experience of life both sides of the Berlin Wall, was of advantage, as the question of the SED's ability and inclination to reform became a pertinent issue on an international level.

After years of reticence in expressing his political opinions, Becker began from 1987 onwards to publicly criticise the GDR for its failure to follow Gorbachev's lead with his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika.* This decision is perhaps most famously encapsulated in Kurt Hager's dismissive description of Soviet reforms in April 1987 as mere 'Tapetenwechsel' that the GDR had no intention of copying. The first such criticism from Becker was an essay published in February 1987, 'Die Ernüchterung' which effectively spelled the end of any hope he may have harboured that the GDR was capable of, or even willing to reform. Indeed, when asked in an interview with *ZDF* that same month if he had any hope that the process of reform taking place in the USSR could happen in the GDR, Becker replied ironically: 'Die Hoffnung teile ich natürlich, obschon ich nicht sehr hoffnungsvoll bin.' (BStU MfS A/P 2777/92 Band 2) In 'Die Ernüchterung' Becker expresses the belief he had held for years that elements of the GDR political elite had always embraced the concept of a more open democracy, yet simply had not felt strong enough to follow these liberal desires against the will of the mighty Soviets. One would have to wait, 'bis auch dort sich ähnliche Tendenzen durchsetzten, dann werde man keine Sekunde zögern, sich ihnen anzuschließen. Auf einmal wird klar, daß diese Vermutung keinen anderen Grund hatte als den Wunsch, es möge so sein'. (EG: 52) Suddenly, Becker continues, it has become clear to him that the GDR *Politbüro* consists only of the type of politician Gorbachev is trying to banish from positions of power in the Soviet Union and he expresses his fury at them for not only missing the opportunity to reform, but for also potentially jeopardising this process in the USSR. 'Die DDR ist bedeutend genug, um durch Parteinahme in dieser wichtigsten Auseinandersetzung der Gegenwart einen gewissen Einfluß ausüben zu können, und genau das versucht sie: Ihre Reaktion ist reaktionär.' (EG: 53) While Gorbachev was seeking to encourage public debate in Russia, the GDR continued to outlaw any independent political groups. A key example here is the *Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte* (IFM), which was founded in January 1986 and started publishing the illegal *Grenzfall* in June of the same year. Partly as a result of the distribution of this leaflet at the 1986 *Friedenswerkstatt* and of the high profile of the expressly-forbidden IFM there, the same event was forbidden the following year (Fulbrook 1995: 222). Concluding his essay, Becker refers to the Prague Spring, the incident which first caused him to doubt the political validity of the SED two decades earlier:

> Beim Einmarsch in die CSSR im Frühling 1968, an dem DDR-Soldaten beteiligt waren, durfte man glauben: Na ja, die Russen wollten es so, und da mußten sie mitmachen. Der

> Gedanke konnte einen zwar nicht beruhigen, doch schien er als Erklärung zu taugen. Heute liefert die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands den späten Beweis, daß ihr der Einmarsch damals eine Herzensangelegenheit gewesen ist. (EG: 53)

This essay certainly declares beyond any doubt that Becker has no surviving hope that the SED is capable of liberalisation and, perhaps more significantly, that he now sees his earlier belief in GDR socialism as naïve and unrealistic. By associating contemporary SED politics with what he considered to be one of post-war socialism's darkest moments, the crushing of the Prague Spring, Becker is clearly showing that he holds the current regime in no better regard than those responsible for what he now sees as the illegal invasion of Czechoslovakia. However, this sense of disillusionment and the bleak tone of Becker's essay here should not be read as resignation. Indeed, the very title of 'Die Ernüchterung' is reminiscent of Becker's claim in 'Ansprache vor dem Kongreß der unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen', 'daß Fortschritt auch in Ernüchterung bestehen kann'. (NZ: 209) Here, too, there is a positive element to Becker's final disillusionment with GDR socialism: namely that it has only been brought about by the move towards a more open and democratic form of socialism in the Soviet Union, the true inadequacies of the system exposed by the emergence of a superior alternative. The explicit criticism of the SED on the one hand is implicit praise of Gorbachev and an expression of modest optimism for the future of democratic socialism on the other hand.

Becker reinforces this viewpoint more clearly in another essay, 'Auf- und Abrüstung', published in April 1987. This second essay, as the title suggests, focuses on the arms race, or specifically on Gorbachev's attempts to bring it to an end with his proposals at the Geneva and Reykjavik summits (in 1985 and 1986 respectively) to reduce the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons in return for the USA abandoning its Strategic Defense Initiative.[82] The tone of the text is heavily sarcastic, directed towards the West's failure to take Gorbachev seriously. Ironically, it criticises 'diese[n] russische[n] Einfaltspinsel' who has upset the established international military protocol of only offering to disarm when secure in the knowledge that such offers will be rejected. Instead, with his ridiculous notion that 'der Sinn von Vorschlägen sei es, akzeptiert zu werden', Gorbachev has utterly failed to notice 'daß er mit seiner Unüberlegtheit die zivilisierte Welt in die schwerste Rechtfertigungsnot stürzt.' (EG: 54) In his praise of and declaration

[82] The INF treaty signed by the USA and the USSR in December 1987 offered disarmament from the Soviet Union without resolving the disagreement over SDI.

of support for Gorbachev, who is 'wie ein Alptraum über die Regierungen der USA, der Bundesrepublik, Englands oder Frankreichs gekommen' (EG: 55), Becker is able to express his contempt for the military politics of the West. Moreover, Becker's clear admiration for Gorbachev and his politics signals that here he has found someone with whom he can identify politically. In his position of power, Gorbachev is working to achieve something similar to Becker's own notion of democratic socialism. Importantly at this time, the positive identification point Gorbachev's socialism represents for Becker transcends any narrow notion of Germanness, or German socialism. After his disillusionment with the GDR and inability to assimilate or develop critically in the West, a problem exacerbated from 1985 onwards by the *Historikerstreit,*[83] Becker found in the Soviet drive for reform a positive identity point that was, for him at least, uncomplicated by questions of history or nationalism.

In a 1988 essay with the title 'Verhaltensstörung', Becker redirects his criticism back to the SED's continuing oppressive practices. The essay was written in response to the violent repression of dozens of peaceful demonstrators who, marching under the banner 'Freiheit ist immer Freiheit des Andersdenkenden', attempted to take part in the ceremonies on 17 January marking the anniversary of the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Several of the demonstrators were arrested. Becker describes this as an example of the GDR's regular habit of inflicting on itself 'eine[r] schwere[n] Tortur, eine[r] Art von Selbstverstümmelung: Als stehe sie unter einem bösem Zwang, straft sie dann ein paar ihrer Leute ab, offenbar in der Überzeugung, nur so eine Ausbreitung des Ungehorsams verhindern zu können'. (EG: 59) Like Gorbachev, the slogan of the demonstrators and its source, Rosa Luxemburg herself, were further positive identity points for Becker. Luxemburg personified the face of human socialism and, importantly, she too represented a concept of socialism which transcended Germanness and national politics. A staunch pacifist with a cosmopolitan outlook, Luxemburg's vision of a socialist utopia rejected nationalism in all its forms and, as can be seen from the above quote, advocated a more emancipative form of democracy than Marx or Lenin. At a time when Gorbachev was championing a similar approach to socialism and against the backdrop of the *Historikerstreit*, this historical notion of socialism conceived before the Third Reich again offered Becker a political frame of reference with which he could identify.

[83] See section 3.3.4 for an exploration of Becker's response to the *Historikerstreit.*

The harsh punishments levied on the demonstrators were in stark contrast to the manner in which such dialogue was being encouraged in the Soviet Union and much of Becker's essay focuses on contrasts between the two states. Becker compares Gorbachev's attempts 'die Menschen aus ihrer Kritik- und Denkstarre zu erlösen, aus ihrer Lethargie' with the SED's contentment 'alle vier Jahre von 99,8% der Bevölkerung gewählt zu werden'. He also notes that although Soviet reforms still have a long way to go, 'schon jetzt hätte ein Drittel der Sowjetbürger Strafverfahren wegen Zusammenrottung oder Staatsverleugnung am Hals, wenn dort die DDR-Regeln gelten würden'. (EG: 61) As we saw with 'Die Ernüchterung', Becker is now seeking to distance himself critically from his former party and he emphatically rejects its failure to embrace the new Soviet policy of reform. Instead he is choosing to identify with the more humanist brand of socialism embodied in figures such as Gorbachev and Luxemburg.

4.5.2 Das Ende der Zuversicht

The events of 17 January 1988 served only to reinforce Becker's general disillusionment of the recent months and this sentiment was certainly widespread amongst the GDR's literary elite at the time. A key example here of the level of disaffection the State's handling of the Liebknecht-Luxemburg demonstration caused within the GDR is Monika Maron, who had chosen to stay in East Germany although the three books she wrote in the 1980s were only published in the West. Even when it became clear that the authorities would like to be rid of her, Maron stubbornly chose to remain in the GDR and eventually obtained permission to publish her first novel, *Flugasche* (FRG, 1981), in the GDR.[84] However, after she publicly criticised the arrests of January 1988, this permission was immediately withdrawn again and Maron finally decided to leave the GDR and move to the West only months before the collapse of the state. (Emmerich 1996: 433-4)

Becker and Maron were by no means alone in their disillusionment with the SED. As Wolfgang Emmerich has shown, many of the reformist intellectuals '[waren] schon *vor* 1989 Melancholikern geworden [...]. Ihre Selbstbindung an den "real existierenden Sozialismus" war längst löchrig, ambivalent geworden'. (Emmerich 1996: 460) Like Becker, such authors were keen to embrace the possibility of the more democratic form of

[84] Maron's subsequent two publications which also only appeared in the West are *Das Mißverständnis* (1982) and *Die Überläuferin* (1986).

socialism that Soviet liberalisation was offering, and for many this sense of optimism prevailed until after the fall of the Berlin Wall. As the political demonstrations demanding openness, democracy and freedom of speech and travel gathered momentum during 1989, many prominent reformist intellectuals now joined or even led the public debate on how such reforms should take place. Indeed, the impetus driving along the new political discourse was so strong that by the autumn of this year 'der historische Augenblick [schien] gekommen zu sein, den erträumten, "wahren" Sozialismus in die Wirklichkeit zu überführen, als das freiwillige Werk eines freien Volkes'. (Emmerich 1996: 458) The climax of this movement is commonly regarded as the mass demonstration which took place in East Berlin's Alexanderplatz on 4 November 1989. Amongst the intellectuals and politicians that spoke at the demonstration were Stefan Heym, Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf, whose famous phrase 'Stell dir vor, es ist Sozialismus, und keiner geht weg' echoed the political hopes and dreams of the reformists. The human rights activist Jens Reich described this day as 'das Beste, was die DDR hervorgebracht hat' (cited in Emmerich 1996: 458) and indeed the hopes of successful political reform seemed well-founded on that euphoric day.

We have seen that the advent of political reform in the Soviet Union had been an initial source of hope to Becker too, yet it seems that even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in stark contrast to the jubilant political demonstrations taking place around him, Becker was once again experiencing a great deal of political confusion. In 'Antwort auf eine Umfrage', a text published in *Die Zeit* on 6 October 1989 in response to the newspaper's questionnaire *Ist der Sozialismus am Ende?* Becker already expresses doubt that socialism can continue to exist, his earlier optimism now replaced by uncertainty. For the first time Becker admits he is experiencing doubts, 'ob eine Theorie sich verwirklichen läßt, die in ihren Prämissen und Schlußfolgerungen wunderbar vernüftig aussieht, die aber davon ausgeht, daß Menschen vernüftige Wesen sind, fähig, sich von ihren Erkenntnissen leiten zu lassen.' (EG: 108) Bitterly Becker notes that capitalism, which he regards as founded on the assumption that people are 'bösartig, rücksichtslos und gewalttätig', is currently proving the more successful of the two social systems. However, there is no doubt that, theoretically at least, socialism remains the only option for Becker, indeed he claims 'das Ende der sozialistischen Idee wäre das Ende der Zuversicht'. (EG: 108) This decidedly gloomy scenario is repeated in the essay's conclusion: 'Wenn der Sozialismus

aus dem Kreis der möglichen Lebensformen ausscheidet, dann fängt, so glaube ich, die Weltuntergangsstimmung erst richtig an.' (EG: 109)

The tone of this essay is unmistakeably bleaker than any of Becker's other political writing of the previous two years. Whereas he proclaimed in 'Die Ernüchterung' that 'die Sache in der Sowjetunion ist ja noch längst nicht entschieden', (EG: 53) it is clear now that for Becker, socialism has become nothing more than a desirable theory. Although he offers no explanation for this loss of hope, it is possible that Becker (correctly) viewed the recent elections in Poland, resulting in a government committed to dismantling communism in favour of a western-style democracy with a free market economy, as an uncomfortable precursor of what would happen if free elections were to be held in the GDR. Within this context, the conclusion of 'Antwort auf eine Umfrage' can possibly be read as a final, desperate exhortation to his readers to reject the temptations of capitalism in favour of reforming GDR socialism, yet the dejected tone of the text and the admission that he sees socialist theory as fundamentally at odds with human nature suggest that Becker no longer regards reform as a realistic possibility. Becker found himself caught in a dichotomy: he is unable to envision a society without socialist aspirations but at the same time no longer believes in the possibility of socialism in practice. This pessimism also goes some way to explaining Becker's reluctance to become involved in the political demonstrations which took place in the GDR in the late summer and autumn of 1989, and indeed in a 1995 interview he defended his continuing reluctance to engage in political activities 'wegen des Bewußtseins der Sinnlosigkeit'. (EG: 238)

However, there were further motivations behind Becker's decision to hold himself back from political activity prior to German unification, not least his continuing refusal to adopt the social identity of East German dissident he still felt was imposed on him in the West. Moreover, Becker also admitted that he had reservations 'wieder um Aufnahme in einer Gruppe zu bitten, die ich zwölf Jahre zuvor verlassen hatte'. (O'Doherty & Riordan 1998: 18) Within a debate focusing more narrowly on specific German political issues, Becker feels isolated. He has critically distanced himself from the East and now feels estranged from his former allies there, and is also wary of any activity which could label him a GDR dissident. On a German-German level, Becker does not find a position he can identify with and internationally, as Gorbachev's position in the Soviet Union became increasingly fragile, Becker struggled to find a positive identity point in the political discourse. In a 1992 interview Becker further explained that he had held deliberately held

himself back from political debate at that time for personal reasons - his wife had just had a child and he was in the process of writing *Amanda herzlos.* 'Während man einen Roman schreibt, ist man gut geraten, nicht allzuviel anderes, vor allem nicht allzuviel Aufregendes zu tun.' (Traub & Becker 1992: 106) This is a clear departure from his earlier position when, most overtly in *Schlaflose Tage* and in *Irreführung der Behörden*, Becker used his work as a means of evaluating his current political situation. Now for the first time, Becker is expressly separating his writing from any form of political activity rather than seeing the latter as an important function of his role as a writer.

For those reformists who had continued to believe in the possibility of a democratised GDR for months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reality of the situation as it evolved with the March 1990 elections signalling a rejection by the people of socialism came as a great ideological blow. In the words of Wolfgang Emmerich (1996: 458) 'die Utopie wurde, was ihre wörtliche Bedeutung sagt: ortlos'. Emmerich (1996: 459) refers to Braun's poem 'Der Nachruf'[85] as an example of the crisis of identity that many authors experienced at this time, two lines of which in particular show the loss of this Utopian ideal: 'Was ich niemals besaß, wird mir entrissen. / Was ich nicht lebte, werd ich ewig missen.' This is a poem of disappointment from Braun for those who, in his view, gave up too early on the possibility of a reformed socialism. Along with Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym, Braun had been amongst the initial signatories of the 'Für unser Land' statement, published on 26 November 1989, which called for a reformed, democratic socialist GDR fully independent of the FRG.[86] Braun saw the unification of Germany as 'ein Ausverkauf unserer materiellen und moralischen Werte'. (Bahrmann & Links 1999: 100) Having chosen to stay in the GDR without ever giving up the dream of a socialist utopia, Braun is not yet able to come to terms with the demise of East Germany.

For Becker, however, this utopian dream had ceased to exist some time ago. In an essay written in early 1990, 'Über die letzten Tage: Ein kleiner Einspruch gegen die große deutsche Euphorie', Becker confirms the end of his hope for socialist reform and dismisses those who had retained such hope as politically naïve. 'Irgendwie, über alle Erfahrungen hinweg und jenseits aller Intelligenz, existierte die Hoffnung, die sozialistischen Länder könnten einen anderen Weg gehen. Diese Sache hat sich nun erledigt.' (Becker 1990d: 90) Yet despite the fact that the current political situation is in line with his earlier

[85] The full text of Braun's poem is given in section 3.4.2.
[86] For the full statement see Bahrmann & Links (1999: 100)

expectations, Becker remains vehemently opposed to the possibility of German unification. For him, the West contains only 'Gesellschaften ohne Zielvorstellung' and while he acknowledges that the demise of GDR socialism is in itself nothing to mourn, it is the finality of the situation that he finds so depressing. 'Das wichtigste an den sozialistischen Ländern ist nichts Sichtbares, sondern eine Möglichkeit. Dort ist noch nicht alles so entschieden wie hier. Diese Ungewißheit [...] hält die einzige Hoffnung am Leben, daß es nach uns mit dem Leben noch weitergeht.' (Becker 1990d: 90) In this essay Becker is echoing the bleak mood of his earlier text, 'Antwort auf eine Umfrage' while at the same time expressing the new feelings of confusion the *Wende* period is causing for him. As with Braun's 'Nachruf', this text suggests that the author's political aspirations have been reduced to an irresolvable paradox, a problem shared not only by many East German authors, but also by the West German left. Friedrich Dieckmann describes a fundamental crisis of identity facing many liberal and conservative West Germans at this time too as 'eine Verunsicherung, die daraus wächst, daß das sichernde Antisystem auf einmal verschwunden ist. Antisysteme sichern das eigene System'. (cited in Emmerich 1996: 463) For the past decade Becker had often positioned himself politically in opposition to both East and West Germany, his own stance secured by the presence of these two 'Antisysteme' and he now found this position destabilised. His relative political isolation in the West, reinforced by his social identity of East German dissident, had established Becker's critical position with regard to capitalism. Simultaneously, Becker's rejection of socialism as it was practised by the SED in favour of a more democratic socialism, supported in later years by his positive identification with Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika*, had enabled him to establish his identity as a humanist socialist. The demise of the GDR and, more importantly, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, meant that both the ideological and the physical reference points with which Becker constructed this identity were lost.

This sense of confusion precipitated by the *Wende* brings about another phase of silence in Becker's political work - for the next three years he did not publish any further speeches or essays with a political content, and his 1992 novel *Amanda herzlos* set in the latter years of the GDR ends provocatively in January 1989. Although this cut-off date is no doubt at least partly in defiance of the critical expectations placed on authors at that time, it is likely that Becker was also simply unsure as to how he should continue the novel

into the period of political uncertainty that followed.[87] This claim is supported by Becker's own admission in a 1992 interview that he was experiencing unprecedented levels of confusion at the time: 'Ich will Ihnen gestehen, daß ich noch nie in meinem Leben so verwirrt war wie während der letzten zwei, drei Jahre. Es ist mir noch nie so schwer gefallen, zu Ansichten zu kommen.' (Traub & Becker 1992: 107)

4.5.3 Schuld an allem is nur das Materielle, nichts anderes

It is through the medium of television, the only medium in which Becker had ever managed to set his work in West Germany, that Becker rediscovers his political voice to a small extent. In 1994, as many of the political and social problems of unification had more clearly emerged, the first episodes of Becker's television series *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk* were broadcast and enthusiastically received.[88] In typical self-ironising style the protagonist Becker has created here is Anton Steinheim, a respected West German author who has been commissioned to write the scripts for an intended television series about the problems of reunification. As he does not know any East Germans, Steinheim feels unable to meet his brief and so the television company provide him with the Grimms, 'eine typische Familie im Osten' (Becker 1994b: 35) for him to observe and from whom he is expected to gain the necessary insights to write the scripts.

The Grimm family represents a cross section of post-GDR society, typical yet believable and thus not just stereotypical: grandfather Blauhorn, his daughter Trude who is a teacher, her unemployed husband Benno and their son, Theo, who has yet to decide on a career after recently abandoning his university studies. Becker does not portray the Grimms as having any political or ideological reservations about unification, rather their concerns and worries are purely personal. Furthermore, it is clear that the family's political allegiance is a matter of opportunism. Blauhorn admits to Steinheim in confidence that as a young man he had aspirations of becoming a civil servant and so joined the NSDAP in 1938, then the SED a decade later, obviously without telling anyone about his membership of the Nazi party. 'Heute gelte ich einfach als 'n ehemaliger SED-Genosse, und die Hunde knapsen mir bei der Rente jede Mark ab, die sie nur können... Wenn aber bekannt wäre, daß ich davor schon mal in 'ner anderen Partei war, wär das doch anders? Glauben Sie

[87] See section 3.4.3 for further discussion of this point.
[88] See section 3.4.4 for a fuller discussion of this series.

nich auch...?' (Becker 1995b: 24) Similarly, it seems the Grimms, who have banished their pictures of Lenin and their Marx-Engels volumes to the cellar, have politically opportunist tendencies, as their interfering neighbour is only too happy to tell Steinheim. 'Sie müssen wissen, daß die Familie Grimm immer mit der Zeit geht, da gibt's nichts. Was gerade gewünscht wird – genau dieser Meining war man hier schon immer.' (Becker 1995c: 15)

Yet despite this negative characteristic, the Grimms are not portrayed unsympathetically. In addition to the criticism Becker implies here of opportunism, this political insincerity serves another purpose. Firstly, Blauhorn's readiness to belong to the NSDAP one moment and the SED the next simply in the hope of career advancement, and the implication that such opportunism is widespread, suggests the political divide between the two parts of Germany is rather superficial. If this argument is valid, then it follows that the political freedom the Grimms and Blauhorn have been afforded by unification is somewhat insignificant in comparison to the more existential worries it has brought with it. Blauhorn, for instance, who had always had a good relationship with Benno, finds that they argue constantly now that they are forced to live together under one roof due to his lack of financial independence. This problem is further exacerbated by Benno's unemployment, as he now spends much of his time at home, occupying his time with model building kits, which the hapless Blauhorn accidently knocks down every time he walks past. Also unemployed as a result of unification is Benno's sister, Corinna, who prior to the *Wende* ran a 'FDGB-Heim' providing subsidised holidays for workers and their families. Having consciously decided as a young woman not to marry in order to maintain her financial and personal independence, she now lives with two cats in a one-room flat in a crumbling building. Her relationship to Benno and his family borders on hostile, and the only flowers she receives on her birthday are from the PDS; nobody else has remembered it. Corinna's genuine political conviction and continuing communist loyalty have not lead her to fare better than anyone else in the family.

After months of preparation and observation of the Grimms, Steinheim eventually decides he is still unable to write the series. However, Steinheim and the Grimms have become quite friendly over the course of their working together, and the implication is quite clearly that East and West are still divided more by the political processes of unification and the social inequalities these have caused than by any fundamental ideological differences. Indeed, Benno makes this view explicit in the closing lines of the

final episode, claiming 'die Deutschen sind gar nicht so weit aus'nander, wie's immer behauptet wird. Schuld an allem is nur das Materielle, nichts anderes'. (Becker 1995c: 196) Hence *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk* is not only a criticism of the politics of unification and the social inequities that have arisen as a result of it, it is also a more realistic reappraisal of Becker's earlier socialist hopes for the East. The political opportunism and readiness of former East German citizens to discard their purported socialist ideals in favour of capitalism is represented in Benno's decision to sell his beloved model building kits, a collection carefully put together over years in the GDR, after learning they are worth a small fortune. Further, the neighbour's comment that the Grimms' political convictions are always exactly 'was gerade gewünscht wird' reiterates Becker's revised view first expressed in 'Antwort auf eine Umfrage' that democratic socialism was never a realistic prospect in East Germany.

4.6 Conclusion

Throughout his life, Becker's identity as a socialist is caught in the tension between theory and practice. Growing up under the influence of his father and seduced by a discourse purporting to represent the only true alternative to fascism, Becker's initial identification with socialist ideology is constructed from a combination of an emotional reaction to the past and a genuine faith in the possibility of a utopian future. Although he later recognises this faith to be based on false hope, at the time it offers Becker the opportunity of constructing for himself a positive identity that is separate from and untainted by history or any problematic notions of Germanness. In a repeat of the pattern we saw in the previous chapter examining Becker's identity as a citizen, he only seems able to construct a positive and critical political identity as a socialist within spheres of discourse that transcend any concept of Germanness. In this sense socialism becomes akin to a type of *Verfassungspatriotismus*[89] for Becker in that it offers him positive identity points from which he can overcome to some extent the differences that mark him as an outsider and allows him to achieve a sense of belonging in East German society.

Indeed, in this early period in the GDR Becker's political convictions are so important to him that he is prepared to sacrifice aesthetic considerations in his work in

[89] The concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* allows citizens in post-war Germany to confirm their loyalty and allegiance to the state and its democratic constitution while expressly rejecting nationalist forms of patriotism.

favour of politics: *Schlaflose Tage* is far more an attempt at expressing political opinions for which Becker could find no other public forum than it is a creative literary invention. This unwavering political confidence offers Becker some security when the events surrounding the Biermann affair culminate in almost total upheaval for him in terms of his personal and professional life. It is surely a measure of how deep-rooted Becker's socialist convictions are at the time that he still claims his political hopes, aspirations and intentions remain constant despite his expulsion from the Party, hitherto the single most important physical and ideological embodiment of his political identity. However, this position is neither desirable nor sustainable for Becker and he admitted in hindsight that at this time his political stance had led him to confuse the roles of writer and 'Widerstandskämpfer'. Indeed, in order to gain some physical distance from the political commotion he was so involved in, Becker chose to spend his first years in the West in the USA 'und wollte dort so lange bleiben, bis ich kein politischer Feind mehr [war], sondern ein literarischer Feind'. (Koelbl 1997: 216)

David Rock sees the time Becker moved to the West in 1977 as a point at which his political profile increased further and claims Becker's political stance 'remained fairly consistent right up to his death.' (Rock 2000a: 123) While this claim may be true in that Becker continued to believe in the superiority of socialism above other socialist systems, this move to the West marked a turning point in Becker's understanding of his own political role, as his comment above demonstrates. Despite his desire to become a literary rather than a political enemy, Becker finds that in the West he continues to be seen as an East German dissident, a label he emphatically rejects. Similarly, he chooses not to become involved in debates surrounding ecological politics or Eurocommunism during the 1980s, possibly also in an attempt to avoid being categorised in political terms. However, this rejection of certain political spheres on the one hand combined with the increasingly apolitical literary discourse of the West on the other hand leaves Becker's positive socialist position destabilised. In the GDR he had used his socialist identity to construct and support other identities, now in the West where these positive reference points are not available, Becker finds he is unable to develop critically and thus becomes isolated from social discourse. We see a dichotomy emerging for Becker between his desire to engage politically and a rejection of the discourses within which this would be possible. Without any positive political identity points, he now defines himself purely in relation to the 'Antisysteme' of the SED on the one hand and western capitalism on the other.

Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts at reforming and democratising socialism across the Soviet bloc offered Becker the positive identity point he needed, and the late 1980s saw a brief resurgence of his political engagement, primarily in the form of essays and speeches. As was the case with Becker's early identification with socialism, Gorbachev's policies offer Becker a concept of socialism that transcends any narrow national or party politics and thus give him hope and a level of optimism he is not able to find in either German state. However, even before German unification and the failure of Soviet reform policies, Becker claims to recognise that while socialism continues to represent the best social theory for him, it will never be possible to achieve in practice.

Hence Becker's earlier positive socialist identity, which he had used to position himself not only politically, but also as a writer and as a citizen and which had once offered him the opportunity to transcend the problematic differences his background presented in post-war Germany, has been reduced to an irresolvable paradox. From the *Wende* period onwards Becker produces very little work of a political nature and any political writing he does produce is extremely desultory when compared to many of his earlier polemical texts. Moreover, these final works do not offer any new political insights or opinions from Becker, rather they are reappraisals and revisions of his previous optimism, which he now appears to regard as naïve. Becker admits that he has deliberately withdrawn from political engagement and feels an 'Unbehagen [...] wenn ich so tun und reden soll, als wäre ich Politiker'. (EG: 239) In a 1995 interview Becker denies that his current position is one of resignation and asks what motivation could intellectuals have 'sich in Aktivitäten zu stürzen, die sie für wenig sinnvoll, für wenig aussichtsreich halten?' (EG: 232) He further concedes that his political position has shifted and that nothing remains of his former socialist aspirations: 'in vielem ernüchtert bin ich, das schon. Als ich ein junger Mann war, kam es mir selbstverständlich vor, daß die Zukunft ein erfreulicher Zustand sein würde. Von dieser Zuversicht is tatsächlich nichts übriggeblieben.' (EG: 233) In both Becker's 1977 text 'Ansprache vor dem Kongreß der unbedingt Zukunftsfrohen' and his 1987 essay 'Die Ernüchterung', the concept of disillsionment (*Ernüchterung*) carries a positive connotation and suggests that the disillusionment has been brought about by the opportunities presented by a superior alternative. By the end of Becker's career this political disillusionment he experiences is only negative.

Conclusion

The differentiated approach adopted by this thesis to examining the theme of identity in Becker's work has revealed a picture of multiple and competing identities complicated not least by Becker's fascinating biography, which rendered him something of an anomaly amongst his peers. From early childhood Becker was aware of this difference and felt the desire to assert a stable identity and thus establish a secure sense of self. Yet his texts show that he was also aware from the beginning of his career of the impossibility of such a task. Much of Becker's writing represents an attempt to subvert or deconstruct unwanted social identities projected onto him by social pressures and other discourses. Similarly, Becker uses his work to explore or reconstruct various facets of his identity or possible directions his life could have taken and demonstrates his keen awareness both of the fragile and ephemeral nature of identity and of the importance of narrative in its construction.

In Chapter One we examined Becker's Jewish writings, beginning with *Jakob der Lügner*, which I argued is primarily an attempt by Becker to challenge the understanding of Jew in the East German consciousness as strange and other. Becker portrays a multifaceted cast of characters to deconstruct the essentialist concept of a predetermined Jewish identity. He is thus also reacting against GDR Holocaust literature, which he saw as perpetuating a Jewish victim identity, and with it his own position as an outsider in the GDR. Becker maintained this stance throughout his Jewish writing, although in *Der Boxer*, the focus is already far more personal as Becker begins in earnest to search for his forgotten past. In 'Mein Judentum', Becker's denial of his Jewishness is undermined by contradictions within the text itself and by similarities between this essay and 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte', which belies an almost wistful longing on the part of Becker to engage with his roots. The problem experienced by second-generation German Jews (or by members of the first generation who are too young to remember their Shoah experiences) of the 'double walls' (Finnan 2000: 454), separating them from their past on the one hand and contemporary society on the other, is thematised here for the first time in Becker's work. Coupled with the problem of generational conflict, this remains the focus of *Bronsteins Kinder*. Although Becker appears almost desperate in 'Die unsichtbare Stadt' to solve the mystery of his past, he does seem later to reconcile himself to the inherently contradictory nature of his Jewish identity, even if he would prefer to resolve some of these tensions. Having internalised post-war German discourse, Becker now readily

defines himself as a Jew in a German context, yet still seeks to deny this identity if it is imposed on him externally.

Chapter Two showed how Becker began his literary career convinced he was engaged in a useful occupation, embracing the socialist realist concept of literature performing an educational social function even though he rejected this literary form itself. In his cabaret texts Becker shows an early awareness of the problems facing writers in the GDR with regard to asserting their artistic independence, and *Irreführung der Behörden* reads as a very personal exploration of the processes Becker was going through himself as he adopted the identity of writer. Despite Gregor's slide into conformity here, I have suggested that at this point Becker still saw his future as a writer as located in the GDR. It was only the Biermann affair and its aftermath that heralded the new, polemically critical stance in Becker's writing and caused him to move West to protect his professional independence. However, the depoliticised literary discourse in West Germany challenged Becker's understanding of what it meant to be a writer and made him feel increasingly insecure as an author in the 1980s. This is reflected in Becker's decision to return to the relatively undemanding medium of television. By the end of the decade he was able in *Warnung vor dem Schriftsteller* to reconcile his conflicting professional aspirations by subscribing to a dialectical notion of an ideal writer, who is able to exert influence over the society around him while remaining untouched by the attendant social pressures and expectations. Indeed, in *Amanda herzlos* Becker creates such a writer and seems to relish the opportunity to explore and manipulate these conflicts and tensions he experienced as an author as he sets himself new literary challenges.

In Chapter Three we saw that Becker's German identity was intrinsically contradictory from the outset. The historical notion of Germanness as inherently evil instilled in him by his father conflicted diametrically with the positive East German identity Becker constructed and which enabled him to establish a sense of *Heimat* in the GDR. This sense of belonging was in itself complicated, as Becker claimed it to be genuine on the one hand (a claim supported by his decision to join the army), yet explained he was only able to feel integrated by hiding his past and projecting a fake identity to his peers on the other. In the West, where he was still seen as an East German dissident, Becker was never able to achieve a comparable sense of belonging. The distance he felt from his surroundings here was further emphasised by his experiences of anti-Semitism. Despite his decision to retain his East German citizenship and thus the theoretical

possibility that he might one day return there to live, Becker's initial response to the demise of the GDR was to distance himself from its citizens by drawing direct comparisons between them and the Nazis, something he had hinted at when he had left the GDR over a decade earlier. It seems Becker sought to dissociate himself from the sense of loss felt by most East Germans at this time. However, as the problems Becker had experienced for years in being caught in the tension between East and West became widespread sentiments in post-unification Germany, he was able to engage in the new social discourse and thus establish a sense of *Heimat* there in a way he had not achieved since the initial caesura in his relationship with the GDR.

Chapter Four argued that Becker's political identity was trapped in the tension between socialist theory, in which he believed whole-heartedly, and the way he witnessed it being practised in the GDR and the eastern bloc. While Becker's early socialist stance may have stemmed initially from a desire to assimilate, by the time he approached adulthood this was founded in genuine ideological commitment. It is indicative of just how deep-rooted Becker's socialist convictions were that his political aspirations remained fairly constant right up to the *Wende*, despite his disillusionment with and subsequent expulsion from the SED and despite the lack of any positive point of political identification in the 1980s prior to the ascent of Gorbachev to head of the Soviet Union. Indeed, Becker viewed his earlier experience of disillusionment with the Party in 1976 as a positive event in his political development, rejecting one form of socialism in favour of a superior and more realistic alternative. Although Becker no longer harboured any political optimism for the GDR, the failure of Gorbachev to realise his reformist policies dealt Becker's socialist aspirations a blow from which he never recovered. His political texts from the 1990s read for the most part as revisions of his previous optimism, which he now views in disparaging terms as naïve and unrealistic from the outset.

Hence we see that in contrast to the other identities explored here, where Becker learns to some extent to reconcile or accept the conflicts they pose, Becker's identity as a socialist ends in almost total disillusionment as even his revised hopes for a more moderate form of socialism fail to be realised. As Becker had previously used his political beliefs to construct other facets of his identities, these are similarly destabilised with his political disenchantment. Growing up in the GDR, Becker had used his socialist convictions and affinity to the SED to establish a national identity and sense of *Heimat* there which transcended any understanding of Germanness associated with his past suffering at the

hands of the Nazis and which helped him overcome the difference he felt from his peers as a result of this past. The various crisis points Becker experienced in his political optimism undermined his positive East German identity and caused this sense of difference to rise to the fore again.

This disengagement from the political sphere did, however, have positive implications for Becker's identity as a writer. We have already noted that Becker's motivations for becoming an author in the first place were a combination of the personal desire for self-expression and the political aspiration of being able to exert influence on the society around him. I argue here that Becker's integrity as a writer was threatened not only by external pressures, but by his own construction of this identity as inextricably linked to that of socialist. It is clear that Becker's position as a writer is primarily called into question at times of political crisis for him, as reflected in *Schlaflose Tage*, where Becker allowed his need to express his political opinions to take precedence over aesthetic considerations. Privileging his identity as a writer above that of GDR citizen, Becker moved West to try to regain sovereign control of his work. However, as he continued to define his role as an intellectual in political terms, Becker struggled to write. His one novel from the first half of this decade, *Aller Welt Freund*, is in itself an expression of the disorientation and confusion Becker felt at this time. At the end of the decade, coinciding with the first admission from Becker that he no longer saw socialism as a realistic possibility, we see him for the first time consciously separating literature from any political involvement, as he refuses firstly to participate in the *Literaturstreit* then to tackle the problems of unification in *Amanda herzlos*.

Becker was by no means alone in reassessing his role as a writer as his political goals failed to be realised at this pivotal moment in Germany's history. Emmerich cites Christoph Hein's claim of 1991 'es sei seine "Wunschvorstellung", seinen "Elfenbeinturm zu renovieren"', to show that Hein, previously a vocal participant in the *Bürgerbewegung* campaigning for a reformed, socialist GDR, was now pleading instead 'für eine strikte Trennung von Kunst und Leben'. (Emmerich 1996: 478) Similarly, Andrew Plowman (2002: 84) shows how in Helga Königsdorf's first novel written after unification, *Gleich neben Afrika* (1992) '[t]he critical role of the writer and the utopian function ascribed to literature are foregrounded', while 'the narrator's situation reflects the loss of orientation which Königsdorf described in her own essays during the *Wende*'. For Becker, this reassessment resulted in a far more personal narrative stance than he had previously

championed in his work. His thorough disillusionment with and disengagement from politics enabled him to assert his independence as a writer in a manner that he had not previously found possible, even within the post-*Tendenzwende* literary discourse of West Germany in the 1980s. That Becker relishes the opportunity to manipulate his identity as a writer through his work is nowhere more evident than in *Amanda herzlos.*

Even prior to this liberation from political engagement, I argue that Becker's role as a writer was the identity in which he felt the most secure. Although we have seen that Becker struggled during the 1980s to produce prose, this was altogether a difficult time for him, where his political identity was destabilised and his positions as a Jew and a German were undermined by his experiences of anti-Semitism, to the point where he felt entirely 'heimatlos'. (BStU MfS/AP 2275/92) Indeed, in 1983 Becker claimed: '[h]eimisch bin ich nur am Schreibtisch', (Schwarzenau 1983: 11) and I have shown that it was through an exploration of his position of a writer and reconciling himself to the contradictions he experienced in this role that Becker was able to overcome the crises of identity he faced at this time. Moreover, we have observed that Becker consistently created writers within his fiction to deal with difficult or taboo subject matters he did not feel able to confront himself: In *Der Boxer* it is not Mark but the anonymous reporter who asks Aron the questions Becker was not able to discuss with his own father, and in *Amanda herzlos* Becker creates a cast of writers through which he reworks his identity as an East German.

If the collapse of Becker's socialist optimism had primarily positive implications for his writing, it initially precipitated a crisis in his more fragile identity as a German. We have seen how Becker sought to distance himself from both Germanys during the *Wende* in his essayistic work, yet at the same time reengaged with his GDR past in *Amanda herzlos.* Here Becker is not only mourning the loss of his GDR citizenship, but also the end of his socialist beliefs which had enabled him to construct a sense of *Heimat* in the East. Becker's decision to end the novel with Amanda poised to leave the GDR shows that he considered his own move West still to be a defining moment in his German identity and that his current position was constructed through that experience. Günter Kunert similarly ends his autobiography *Erwachsenenspiele* (1997) at the point when he moved to the Federal Republic at the end of the 1970s, almost two decades before the book's publication.

Whereas Becker had previously only established a sense of *Heimat* through political points of reference, now it was within his role as a writer that Becker was able to

reconstruct a national identity. Through the efforts of Anton Steinheim in *Wir sind auch nur ein Volk*, Becker is able to engage in the discourse of the new Germany and admits to experiencing a greater sense of belonging there than he had previously been able to achieve. He no longer uses his political allegiances to create his *Heimat*, rather he is able now through his relatively secure and independent role as a writer to position himself in the social discourse.

Nevertheless, we have seen that despite this positive identification with Germany, Becker still defined himself as a Jew in contrast to those around him. Lynn Rapaport (1997: 18) has shown how in contemporary German discourse 'Jew-German constitutes a binary cultural code' and means that 'Jews perceive Germans through the lens of the Holocaust experience'. This is certainly true for Becker to an extent, in that we have seen him define himself as a Jew in relation to his German wife. Indeed there is evidence that this code existed in Becker's other relationships too. Colin Riordan shows how an underlying tension exists between Jewish and German characters in the works of Peter Schneider, with whom Becker had a great friendship. In Schneider's *Paarungen* (1992), the German protagonist's friendship to two Jewish figures (who bear various similarities to Becker) is affected by his suspicions that his grandfather may have been involved in the Holocaust. For Riordan (2000: 631), the implication of this novel is 'that the German-Jewish discourse can for the foreseeable future never be free of unwanted associations, and there must always be limits which are observed and conventions which are negotiated'.

Furthermore, this binary code exists as a tension within Becker's own conflicting Jewish and German identities, as each is constantly constructed or undermined by shifts in the other. Indeed, the points at which Becker sought security in his Jewishness are precisely those at which he felt his German identity to be undermined or at its most fragile. Becker's decision to leave the GDR in 1977 coincides with the appearance of 'Mein Judentum' and 'Die beliebteste Familiengeschichte'. Although Becker claims in the former to relish the 'Rätsel' of his past, it is clear in the latter text here that Becker is desperate to access his Jewish roots. Similarly, amongst the body of essays Becker produced in the *Wende* period drawing parallels between contemporary and Nazi Germany, 'Die unsichtbare Stadt' also appeared. Here Becker's need to remember the past as he searches for but fails to uncover '[das] alles entscheidende[n] Stück meines Lebens' is almost tangible. (EG: 117) As these German and Jewish identities are constructed through their difference to each other it appears that Becker particularly seeks to affirm his Jewishness in

order to dissociate from the sense of loss which accompanies the crises in his German identity during these times.

So while Becker initially emphatically rejects his Jewishness in an attempt to validate his German identity, he later seems to reconcile himself to some of these tensions and even uses them to his own advantage. Becker has internalised the post-war German discourse which defines him as a Jew and at the same time has managed to establish a national identity within this society and its discourse. This reconciliation of Becker's German and Jewish selves seems possible 'only by a "negative symbiosis"[90]; a relationship defined by permanent separation from, yet a simultaneous identification with, German culture'. (Finnan 2000: 449)

Hence we can see that the tensions and conflicts within his identities which Becker experienced from his earliest memories are with him to the last. That he felt comparatively secure within his role as an author and that his socialist convictions remained largely consistent for so many years is, I argue, partly because Becker felt he exerted a greater degree of control over them than over his Jewish and German identities. As he had consciously chosen to become a socialist and a writer, he felt that he was constructing his self identity from these positions, whereas he considered his German and Jewish identities to be largely social, discursive constructions and thus far more fragile: We have seen that Becker constantly disputed the fact that he was a Jew and claimed it was a matter of chance that he came to be seen as a German at all. Becker's identity as a socialist was arguably the one which was most important to him initially, as he used it as a tool in constructing a positive *Heimat* and with it managed to transcend to an extent the tensions between his Jewish and German selves. As this identity became increasingly destabilised, so he finally achieved the independence and integrity as a writer he strove for throughout his career. This identity then assumed the function of exploring and constructing Becker's positions as a Jew and German. We see him reconcile these conflicting selves to an extent, recognising that they are inevitable constructions of the specific discourse of post-war Germany in which he finds himself. If Becker's early texts read as attempts to deconstruct or subvert unwanted social identities, then by the end of his career he seems resigned to accepting these identities. In his final interview, just weeks before his death in 1997, Becker stated: 'ich wünsche mir, aussuchen zu dürfen, wer ich bin. Ich weiß, daß man das

[90] This phrase was originally coined by the historian Dan Diner. See Finnan (2000: 449) for further references.

nur in Maßen kann, und ich weiß, daß, ob man will oder nicht, man auch derjenige ist, für den die anderen einen halten. Davor gibt es keine Rettung.' (215)

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6.1 Archive Sources

1. Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin: *Jurek Becker Archiv.*

Becker's *Nachlaß*, which comprises over 18,000 pages, came into the possession of the *Akademie der Künste* in early 2000. Here I found many unpublished texts, notes and personal documentation from Becker's time in the GDR to be particularly valuable in my research. The archive also contains countless letters and other forms of personal correspondence from the 1980s and 1990s as well as preparatory work and early manuscripts for Becker's novels, scripts, stories and essays. The archive is navigable via an excellent 350-page *Findbuch* available in both electronic form and hard copy. The individual documents I refer to in the thesis are referenced in an abbreviated form in accordance with this *Findbuch.* For example, the cabaret text 'Et jibt...', sig. 79 in this archive, is referenced as: AdK, JBA, 79.

2. Die Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin: *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit.*

This archive contains extensive documentation on surveillance on Becker from 1957 into the 1980s. In particular, Becker's 'OV' file, which spans the period 1968-1982 and fills four volumes, can be viewed here. He was allocated the codename "Lügner". As many documents have been anonymised to protect the identity of individuals, some files are of limited use. Again I have referenced individual documentation in the thesis in accordance with the archive's own reference system, which is inherently complex - new users of the archive are issued with a 125-page *Abkürzungsverzeichnis* which contains only the *Stasi's* 'häufig verwendete Abkürzungen und Begriffe'. The most commonly cited abbreviations in this thesis are MfS, Ministerium für Staatssicherheit; AP (sometimes also A/P), Allgemeine Personenablage; and BdL, Büro der Leitung, eg. of the Ministry itself or of a regional office.

3. Das Bundesarchiv, Berlin: *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO-DDR).*

The main archives I consulted here were DR1, containing *Druckgenehmigungsvorgänge*; DR117, the DEFA archive; DY30, containing documentation from the SED and DY27, the archive of the *Kulturbund.*

6.2 Primary Literature

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6.2.2 Essays in Journals and Anthologies

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